

CITY OF NEWARK, NJ'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview With Willie Belle Hooper, March 28, 1996

Q: Today is March 28, 1996, approximately 1:30, 2 o'clock in the evening at the lovely home of Mrs. Willie Belle Hooper. My name is Catherine J. Lenix-Hooker and I will be talking to Mrs. Hooper this afternoon about her life as we document the African-American Oral History of people who have lived or been born or come to Newark, New Jersey. Good afternoon, Mrs. Hooper.

Hooper: Good afternoon, Catherine. How are you?

Q: I'm just fine. Just fine. To begin with I want to just have you repeat. Give me your complete name.

Hooper: Willie Belle Hooper.

Q: And how old are you?

Hooper: Eighty-nine and, eighty-nine years and seven months.

Q: So you were born when?

Hooper: Nineteen 0 six, September the second.

Q: Nineteen 0 six. And where were you born?

Hooper: I was born in Dothan, Alabama.

Q: Dothan, could you spell that?

Hooper: D O T H A N, Dothan.

Q: Dothan, Alabama. And could you tell me something about the work you did, your occupation?

Hooper: My occupation.

Q: Or your occupations. You may have had many jobs in life.

Hooper: My occupation. Teaching. I am a teacher.

Q: Then the primary job was teaching. And any other kinds of work?

Hooper: I have done a little bit of every kind of work I think.

Q: Because your occupation changed over the years?

Hooper: Yeah. Whenever money was needed, I did whatever I could do in order to obtain money to help to live.

Q: I see. Now let's talk about your education. How far did you go in school?

Hooper: I went to school in the south, and I finished and took the state examination for teaching. And then I went to normal school every summer after I passed the exam about three years.

Q: Normal school. Where was this?

Hooper: In Florence. I lived in Florence.

Q: Florence, I'm sorry, Florence.

Hooper: Florence, South Carolina.

Q: Oh so you left Alabama.

Hooper: I left Alabama when my father. I don't need, I don't suppose you want.

Q: Yeah. Tell me. When did you leave Alabama, trying to get you here to Newark. Now, you left Alabama and you went.

Hooper: I left Alabama. My father was a porter on the railroads. What happened I don't know, cause I was a little girl. But what happened my father had to leave Alabama because of whatever happened. The trouble that he got into. And, of course, he came from there to Georgia. And we followed him each step of the way. Because he was trying to get away from Alabama because his brother told him that if he did not leave, whatever he had done, they would hang him.

Q: I see. So.

Hooper: So he left by night. So our first stop was Georgia. Lathchier, Georgia. We stayed there a while. Then he left there and he went to Charleston, South Carolina. And, of course, everywhere he went, he was a family man and he didn't want to leave his family behind. So everywhere that he went, he would somehow get us there. And, of course, we stayed in Georgia for a little while with my mother's brother. We left there and came to Charleston where we did not have any relatives. But we managed to get in a house to live in. No furniture, no stove to cook on. My mother cooked in the fireplace. We slept on pallets and just lived. But we had a house. My mother was a seamstress, sewing. She lived with an old lady that was a fortune teller, whatever you call em. Fortune teller, worker, whatever. She would own the house that we lived in. But she had a great big lot, and she had it all fenced in. She had two houses.

Q: This was where?

Hooper: Her houses she lived in. She had two houses for people that came to her to do things for them.

Q: Where were you? What state were you in now? You in South Carolina?

Hooper: In South Carolina. Charleston, South Carolina. She had a house that when she had white patrons come, and whatever she was doing for them, they stayed overnight. She had a house for the white people, and she had a house for the black people. So she did whatever she was doing, whatever roots or whatever they called it. She did it for them while they stayed there overnight. And then they would leave. So I had to always open the gate and let them into her lot, and she'd lock the gate up.

Q: How old were you at the time of this?

Hooper: I must have been about eight or nine years, maybe ten years old.

Q: Now, we were talking about your education, and we were talking about how far you went in school. And you mentioned that you would go, you went to normal school in South Carolina. That's how we started talking about South Carolina. Tell me something more about your education. Did you complete it?

Hooper: Well, I didn't go to school then. Cause my father didn't stay in one place long enough. He was trying to get away. Wherever he was going, I don't know whether he was trying to get to New Jersey or not. But he had a brother in New Jersey. And he may have had in his mind that he would get to New Jersey eventually. So I didn't go to school very much. Well, I left there about a couple of years. I was in and out, you know, just got a little bit of education. But I managed to keep up because I was smart enough to keep my grades up so that I could go into class according

to my age. When we left in South Carolina I didn't go, in Charleston I didn't go to school at all. And then stayed in Charleston a long time. I don't know the length of time. I couldn't, really can't tell you what because I do not know. Time was just passing so fast. So my father decided that he would get a little farther up the road. So he left Charleston, South Carolina and came to North Carolina.

Q: Do you remember where in North Carolina?

Hooper: I think it was Raleigh. I'm not sure. Wherever Shaw University is. That's where he came to. And he stayed there, and he decided now he could come back and get us. And he made the arrangements to come to get us. And, of course, my mother couldn't talk to him because we didn't have telephones to really talk to anyone. All she knew when she got a letter and daddy was coming and what date he was coming. So, in the meantime, she had us all ready to leave and come from Charleston, South Carolina to Raleigh, North Carolina. I think it's Raleigh. But in coming back, since my father had been a railroad man, he thought that he would save that money that he had to pay to ride the train. He would hobo to North Carolina and South Carolina. And he'd have that much more money for us to come back with him. So when we he got on the train, instead of, he didn't realize it, and so instead of getting off the train, he stayed on the train. And the train stopped in Florence, South Carolina. He had not gotten off, so they put him in jail. Caught him and put him in jail. Well, my mother didn't know. We were still down in Charleston, South Carolina. She didn't know what had happened. Well, on Monday they took him to court. When they took him to court, there was all these white people, men that sat around looking around to see if there was any black folk. In those days they called them niggers that they could get to help them in what they were doing. And that was on their farms. So this man had a plantation. And he was there.

I never could forget what my father, how my father said it. When this case came up to trial, called his case, he came up and this white man was sitting over there. And he looked at my father, and he held his hand up to the jury so the jury could hear what he was saying. And he said, that looks like he might be a good nigger. I could use him for a foreman. I'll pay his fine. So my father got out this jail sentence, and the man took him to his plantation, gave him a house to

live in. But he had to see that all the other men worked on this farm.

So in the meantime, he gave him time to come and get his family. He left Florence, well, in the country outside of the city. The plantation. So he left there and came to Charleston, South Carolina, and got the family and brought us back to Florence County, and we lived on a farm. In the meantime, while we were living on the farm, there was no school real close. We had to go into the town in order to go to a nine months school. And my father was very concerned about our education. So he then enrolled us in this one room school. And I went there one year. And the next year my father said he could not have that because we had to have an education, and he moved and took a sharecrop. This sharecropper right near the town where we could walk to school every morning. So, took the sharecrop and he went there. But the white man that had the sharecrop did not like it because we were going to school every day. So he said we had to stop and be sure that my father's crop was made right. And so my father had another argument, a good argument rather I should say, and my father said, well, you don't have to give me money. He said, I will not give you money if you're going to continue those children to school every day. My father said, you send yours, don't you. The man told him, he said, yeah, but my children don't have to work the farm. Your children gotta learn how to work the farm. And they can't go to school and work the farm because they're in school all day. So my father said, that's all right if you don't give me any money to run the crop. I'll make it.

So he took a part time job at a factory. And he worked part time at this factory to get money to support his family. And he worked the farm by the moonlight. Cause he worked until the sun went down, and he tried by the moonlight and made his crop, finished it and made it all that year. And when he ended up being had a settlement, then he moved from the country into the little town of Florence, South Carolina, so that we could go to school nine months like everybody else. Not five months because schools didn't go four and five months because their children had to stop and go to work. They couldn't go to school and work. So that's why I grew up in Florence.

Q: I see. Now, just to complete, and maybe we'll skip a bit, but we'll come back to this. Just to complete your education, how much education did you ultimately receive?

Hooper: Well, I went to Wilson High School.

Q: That was in Florence?

Hooper: Florence.

Q: And from high school then where?

Hooper: Wilson High School. From there I went to, they had it summers, but it was called normal school but you only went in the summer. Because all the people that have passed exam and qualified for teachers, they had to go to summer school every year, and that was considered normal school. And then after I finished the first year, I took the exam for a teacher and I passed. And after I passed the exam, I was certified to teach, but I only taught in the rural schools. Four and five, that's one room school, four and five months.

Q: What year was that?

Hooper: Oh lord.

Q: How old were you when, let's say this, how old were you when you began teaching?

Hooper: I was about eighteen years old. Seventeen or eighteen. Somewhere along there. And some day I'll show you a picture when I first went off.

Q: Oh wonderful. Okay. Now, we're gonna go to another topic and then we're gonna talk further about your family. We're going to talk about you marriage. Who did you marry and when and where?

Hooper: Oh lord. I married Dixon. He didn't live long. He died before our first child was born.

Q: And his whole name was?

Hooper: I have a son.

Q: What his whole name, Dixon's?

Hooper: But he did not.

Q: What was his name?

Hooper: His name was Ralph. But he didn't use Dixon because when my mother sent him to school, they didn't have to have certificates and things to go to school.

Q: Okay. Let's go back. You're saying that your first husband's name.

Hooper: Dixon.

Q: All right. But he died before your first child?

Hooper: Yes.

Q: I see.

Hooper: And when but Ralph went by Sanders because when my mother sent him to school along with my sister, they just put him down Sanders and he always remained that.

Q: So you were very young when he died?

Hooper: Very young. Around eighteen. Seventeen, eighteen.

Q: And then where was this? This was in South Carolina?

Hooper: Florence.

Q: In Florence, I see.

Hooper: Florence, South Carolina.

Q: You second husband.

Hooper: Well, I went off to teach.

Q: All right.

Hooper: And I taught in Make City, South Carolina, a little town north. And I stayed there one year. After that year, I thought I would like to be closer home so I began looking for another place to work. So I got a job in Mars Bluff, M A R S B L U F F, Mars Bluff, South Carolina. And I lived with a lady, boarded with her, and I met her nephew, Chester. Which his name was Manchester.

Q: Manchester?

Hooper: Hooper. We eventually got married. But my mother kept my son because I said I didn't want him to have a stepfather. And I wouldn't marry for a long time. And finally my mother just said, well, marry if you want to because you don't have any child. He's mine. She took him. They took him. She and my father took him right then and there. And my father and mother brought him up.

Q: So you married Manchester Hooper.

Hooper: Manchester Hooper.

Q: Okay. And what kind of work did your husband do?

Hooper: Farmer. I can't tell you what else. This don't need to go in, he was a bootlegger too.

Q: That was honorable work in the south. I had a lot of family members bootlegging. [Laughter]
You can use it if you want to. You can use the term he was a bootlegger. Tell me more about your children then. I'd like to know the names of your children, when they were born, where they born.

Hooper: I had my first son Chester. Born in Mars Bluff, South Carolina. That was Manchester Hooper, Jr. Then came Willie, or William. His name was William Malachia after his both of his grandfathers' name. William M A L A C H I A.

Q: And then after Willie. Then Willie. After Willie was born --

Q: And he was born, he was born in South Carolina.

Hooper: They were born in Mars Bluff, South Carolina. Willie came along. Then we decided that we would come to Jersey. We came to Jersey.

Q: Where in New Jersey? Where?

Hooper: Newark.

Q: Newark.

Hooper: 37 South Orange Avenue.

Q: Do you remember what year you came to Newark?

Hooper: Nineteen.

Q: Nineteen nineteen. I'm sorry. You were saying.

Hooper: Came in 1929.

Q: Okay, your next child?

Hooper: Next son, well, after I came here, I knew nothing about how going out to work people. And I couldn't get a job in what I was doing in the south. So the only thing I could have gotten was day's work. So I stayed home. And my husband worked for Ford. In fact, my whole family, my husband, my father and my brother, worked for Ford.

Q: The Ford Motor Company?

Hooper: Yes.

Q: All right.

Hooper: And then.

Q: Well, I wanted to get all the names of your children.

Hooper: But I can't. They weren't born then.

Q: No. I'm gonna. I just want to know all the names of your children, and then we'll talk about your husband's work.

Hooper: Oh. Wilbur was next.

Q: Wilbur.

Hooper: After William came Wilbur. Then Arthur, James and Frankie. Is that seven?

Q: Okay. Start with Ralph. Ralph was, okay. Four, five, six, seven, yes.

Hooper: And Theresa.

Q: So you had eight children.

Hooper: I had eight children.

Q: And okay, and Wilbur, Arthur, James, Frankie and Theresa were born in Newark, New Jersey.

Hooper: No. Wilbur wasn't born here. I was just where I was saying. The trustees kept writing and asking me please come back and teach that winter. And I went back. And that's why Wilbur was born in the south.

Q: In what place?

Hooper: Mars Bluff.

Q: All right. So you and your husband, Manchester Hooper, were married for how long? How long were you married?

Hooper: How long were we together?

Q: Yes. How long?

Hooper: Thirty-five years.

Q: Thirty-five years. And when did he die? Do you remember the year? We can, you know, we can.

Hooper: Yeah. I can get that year, but I don't have it here.

Q: All right. Now I want to talk about your family background. You said a lot about your father never did get his name, and --

Hooper: William.

Q: Okay. I'm going to ask you a couple of things and then I'm going to have to turn the tape over cause we're almost out of time on this side. Give me your father's name.

Hooper: My father was named William Parker, but he dropped the Parker and became a Sanders when he got in trouble.

Q: And where was he born? Do you know?

Hooper: Well, he was a porter on the railroad.

Q: Do you know where he was born? Was he born?

Hooper: Oh where was he born?

Q: Where?

Hooper: Stilson, Alabama. That's what they tell me. I've got a delayed birth certificate upstairs. So that's in jewelry. I came across it the other day.

Q: Okay. Now what about your mother? Her name?

Hooper: My mother was Guilford. But I don't know too much about my mother's side of the family.

Q: All right. Give me her first name. Maiden name last.

Hooper: ADDIE, BELRE. GUILFORD.

Q: Do you know where she was born?

Hooper: Stilson, I think.

Q: Do you remember like the years of their birth? Do you have any idea of when they were born?

Hooper: I might be able to find that. I did know, but I.

Q: Well, maybe our next session we can gather information that you don't have right at hand, and we can add it to our next talk. Okay. Now give me the names of your brothers and sisters in the order of their birth.

Hooper: I was the oldest.

Q: All right.

Hooper: Then my brother was.

Q: What's his name?

Hooper: Horace Greley.

Q: Greeley?

Hooper: G R E L E Y. That's a historical name.

Q: That would be Horace Greley Sanders or Parker?

Hooper: Either one you want. Cause Parker's my real name.

Q: I see. Then after Horace who was born next?

Hooper: After Horace came Frankie.

Q: Frankie or Frank?

Hooper: F R A N K L I N, Franklin.

Q: Franklin his middle name, Franklin Parker.

Hooper: No, just Franklin.

Q: After Franklin?

Hooper: After Franklin came, oh they died so early. Arthur.

Q: If you don't know, just give me.

Hooper: I had a sister, and I'm not sure of her name because she died when she was a little baby. Not a real baby, but about seven, eight years old, somewhere along down in there. That's all.

Q: And that's all. Okay.

Hooper: I mean there are five.

Q: Five including you.

Hooper? Right.

Q: Now, we had talked earlier about your father's occupation. Now by now, tell me more. We talked about his early work on the trains.

Hooper: Yeah. And then he became a foreman on a, for a plantation. After leaving that, he became his own boss. Then he worked in the factories around town. I don't remember the names.

Q: Your mother's occupation?

Hooper: My mother did not go out to work cause she was a seamstress in the hats. She made hats and clothes. She stayed at home.

Q: All right. Do you remember when your father died and your mother died?

Hooper: I think my mother died in 67; my father died way before that. I don't know. I don't remember. I think mom was in 67.

Q: She died in 1967. How old was she?

Hooper: Eighty-three.

Q: And your father, how old was he when he died?

Hooper: Sixty-seven.

Q: You've got a lot of longevity in your family.

Hooper: I have, on my father's side they all lived long. My grandfather lived til he was over a hundred. I don't as much about my grandfather on my.

Q: Do you remember your grandfather's name?

Hooper: Jerry. Jerry Parker.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

Q: Catherine J. Lenox-Hooker, and this is side B of my interview with Willie Belle Hooper on March the twenty-eighth, 1996. You were telling me that your grandfather's name was Jerry Parker. And I'm just trying to find out more about your ancestors. Do you remember your grandmother's name?

Hooper: No by my leaving there early in life, I didn't really get to know my grandparents. There's my grandmother's picture up there. But I didn't get a chance to learn as much.

Q: Beautiful woman. She's the one with the hat, on the end up there.

Hooper: Way at the top. No, she don't have on a hat.

Q: Oh, on the top. Oh, I see. With the white.

Hooper: There's my mother on the second row.

Q: So your name, just to finish up about your immediately family, you told me that you had, you were one of five children born to Addie Belle Guilford and Manchester --

Hooper: No, William.

Q: I'm sorry. And William Parker Sanders.

Hooper: William Sanders Parker.

Q: William Sanders Parker. All right.

Hooper: Okay. I don't have any name.

Q: Yes, you do. And now we're gonna talk about some other things. The migration to Newark. You said that, at one point, your father had a brother here in Newark.

Hooper: Yes. When he first got into trouble, his brother was here in Newark.

Q: So you came to Newark, you said, in 1929.

Hooper: No. I came to Newark, where I came from, see all this other stuff that happened. And I grew up in South Carolina, all this stuff had happened.

Q: So when did you first come to Newark? What were the circumstances how you got to Newark?

Hooper: Well, my father decided it was time for him to leave where he was. He could get a better job. So, left South Carolina, Florence. We came to Jersey. He got a job with Ford. And at that time he came, you were lucky. You could always come and walk into a job. So, go back home and he let my brother and my husband know, and my brothers and my husband came. But they came ahead of us. We came in 1929; they must have come in 1928. They must have come in 1928. I'm not so familiar with it right. I should keep the age, I mean dates, in my mind, but I never did.

Q: Okay. Now when you came to Newark, you came because your husband got a job here.

Hooper: They all got jobs at Ford.

Q: And they sent for you to come.

Hooper: Yes. But when I went back to South Carolina, my husband transferred from Newark to New York and the Post Office because his family, I think, was one of the first families to leave from the south. They were in the taxi business. And they had horses. They used to have horses, taxis. They eventually, I don't know when they bought the house, but they had a house on 138th Street. One of the first blacks to move there.

Q: 138th Street. That's Striver's Road.

Hooper: In New York.

Q: In New York.

Hooper: 138th Street. And after, there was two brothers, a sister, two sisters.

Q: These were your husband's.

Hooper: My husband's family.

Q: Do you remember their names?

Hooper: Let me see.

Q: Well, maybe we can come back.

Hooper: Sammy was one of them.

Q: Do you remember, you're saying that they lived at 138th Street and they were in the taxi business. Did your husband work with them?

Hooper: No. My husband didn't. When my husband left Ford, he went to the Post Office in New York City.

Q: Is that the main Post Office?

Hooper: I guess. All I know is he was working in the Post Office in New York.

Q: When you first came, you gave me an address, I believe earlier, when you got to Newark where did you live first?

Hooper: On our first trip to Newark, I never will forget it, I always keep that in my, 37 South Orange Avenue. Right where the parking lot is now.

Q: Which parking lot?

Hooper: Hall of Records parking lot.

Q: Oh. Okay.

Hooper: And across the street on Springfield Avenue was a great big theater. Now we were all running from the south to get away from segregation, but that theater was segregated. You couldn't go on the first floor. You had to go upstairs. And that theater is on where the academy is now.

Q: Remember the name of the theater?

Hooper: I can't remember the name.

Q: When you came, did you come with other people? Did you come by yourself?

Hooper: No. We came together just the family.

Q: And after you left.

Hooper: We didn't come as. I didn't. I think my mother came. [cross talk]

Q: How did you get here? Did you come by train or bus?

Hooper: Came by train.

Q: You came, I'm sorry.

Hooper: By train.

Q: Do you remember how much it cost to get here?

Hooper: No.

Q: All right. Let's see. So you came to Newark.

Hooper: I think I came with. I can't remember.

Q: Do you remember what the journey was like. That train ride, knowing that you were leaving, probably leaving the south for the last time. Do you remember the trip?

Hooper: It was very nice. Well, I thought we were coming where it would be so much better for us because I had had it bad all my life. When we left Alabama, my mother had, we had a beautiful house on the corner. And that day they didn't have pianos. They had organs that pump. That was what I was taking music on. Beautiful home.

Q: So you left that to come.

Hooper: We had to get rid of everything that we had. My mother had to, after my father left, get rid of everything. So she gave her sister and different ones like you would do in getting rid of your furniture and everything. She got rid of everything. And anyway, they got the money together. Whether my uncles gave my father money, or how we got the money, but we got the money, and we got to Georgia. I don't remember how we got it. My grandfather --

Q: Can we still talk about your trip from the south directly into Newark. You said you sold everything.

Hooper: No we sold everything in Alabama before we came to Georgia. But in Socker Island we had nothing.

Q: All right. So when you got the call to come on to the north.

Hooper: When we came to Newark, we had a house then and it was furnished. But I lived with my mother-in-law and my father-in-law in the country. And my mother and my brother, his wife, they lived in the house with my mother. They had a house. They were furnished.

Q: Okay. Well, I'm talking about now you're on the train. You said it was a nice ride to come to Newark. Was it clean, the train clean? Was it crowded?

Hooper: It was clean.

Q: What kind of food was available.

Hooper: I don't think it was crowded.

Q: Did you, how did you, do you remember eating on the train and bringing any food with you?

Hooper: Yeah. Whatever we had, we brought it.

Q: What did you bring it in, what kind of containers?

Hooper: I don't know. I just know we couldn't afford to buy it.

Q: Did you have to sit in a special place on the train, do you remember?

Hooper: I don't remember the train being segregated. If it was, I forgot it.

Q: Now who met you when you got here?

Hooper: My mother, my father because they were all here, and my husband too.

Q: They met you at the train station.

Hooper: Yes.

Q: Do you remember the things that you brought? What kind of baggage did you bring, any items?

Hooper: Nothing.

Q: You brought nothing.

Hooper: Can't remember anything about what we brought.

Q: Well, when you came here, did you ever plan just to stay a little while and go back to the south?

Hooper: No. I didn't plan it but I did go back because of the trustees begging me to come to teach . And I went back to the school where I worked.

Q: Okay. Any of your other friends come as a result of your coming?

Hooper: No. Just my family. No friends. My mother and my brother and his family.

Q: Well, did you ever go back just to?

Hooper: I went back and stayed five years I guess. Came back in 1935.

Q: You went back to teach for awhile.

Hooper: I stayed down there and taught.

Q: While your husband was here?

Hooper: Part of the time. He stayed up here for, I think, two or three years. Then he came back home too.

Q: Okay. So you first really came to Newark in 29, then back again in 35? You came back in 1935.

Hooper: Yes.

Q: What were your impressions of Newark when you first came? What did you think about the City?

Hooper: Well, money was better. We got better money. The apartment was better cause we moved into one of the first apartments that had been vacated by whites.

Q: Where was that?

Hooper: That was 37. 37 South Orange Avenue. All along there was whites.

Q: So you had a large apartment.

Hooper: We had a nice apartment.

Q: Do you remember how much it cost? How much the rent was?

Hooper: Can't remember.

Q: Well, what was your neighborhood like? Was it like a commercial area with shops? Tell me about your neighborhood.

Hooper: It was beautiful. We could walk right downtown. But so many places downtown was segregated and you couldn't go into. Like used to have a restaurant down there named Child's. Couldn't go in there. They wouldn't serve you; they would just ignore you.

Q: I see. What about some of your neighbors? You said they were white, mainly white people that lived up there.

Hooper: But I don't know. Didn't know them. I just know they lived there. But I didn't.

Q: Do you know what kind of people they were?

Hooper: No. Didn't know anything about them. Just see them as we going and coming.

Q: So where did you go next, after that where did you live after you left South Orange Avenue?

Hooper: 494, I think, Huntington Street. I think that's where we moved.

Q: What kind of place was that?

Hooper: It was nice too. It wasn't heavily mixed, not many blacks.

Q: Well, why did you move from South Orange to Huntington?

Hooper: I don't know. I guess we were looking for more rooms. Because we were trying to live

together so you could because that was all we knew.

Q: So you're saying the family tried to.

Hooper: My uncle that I said had been, my father I think was coming, who had died this time between all these changes. And they lived in Woodcliff Street. And right over here where the vocational school is on West Market Street.

Q: I'm not sure. I know West Market. West Market and what?

Hooper: It's a kind of college. Go right up the street just next to Essex County College, over there is a school that's a vocational school. Well, anyway, right there that's Woodcliff Street going that way. And then my uncle lived in there. His wife and his family lived there because he was dead then.

Q: So after you left that home, where did you move?

Hooper: Huntington Street.

Q: After you left Huntington Street, yes, where did you move next?

Hooper: I moved to Waverly Avenue.

Q: Okay. You remember, tell me something about that neighborhood.

Hooper: Waverly and Charlton Street. That's where [?] grew.

Q: Where who grew? I'm sorry. You were saying?

Hooper: The West. You know, Mr. West, the assistant to the mayor.

Q: Oh, oh. Calvin West.

Hooper: Calvin West.

Q: Yes, okay.

Hooper: Know when he shined shoes on the corner.

Q: Is that right?

Hooper: He was just a boy. Had a little stand, he put it on the corner. And we lived in this house on Waverly Avenue across the street. And we was [?]. And the playground was there too. And Waverly Avenue moved to Stratford Place.

Q: Stratford Place. Okay. Why did you move there? What kind of place was it?

Hooper: It was an apartment. I don't know how many rooms. It was a two, four, six family house I think. I lived in the back apartment on the first floor. And we decided to move from there, I don't know why we decided to move, but we moved farther up Stratford Place, and it was in a, it was 22. We lived in 61, then we moved to 22. And it was a real flat.

Q: A straight through.

Hooper: Yes. We lived in that.

Q: How was that neighborhood? How was that area?

Hooper: Well, there was quite a few colored in that neighborhood, black or whatever. There were quite a few in that neighborhood. Weren't too many whites at all. One the corner was a tavern and things like that. It was beginning to go down.

Q: So after you left Stratford Place.

Hooper: Stratford Place. Came Vreelinhsen Avenue. 75.

Q: What year was this when you came to Vreelinhsen? Who was the baby?

Hooper: Frankie.

Q: Frankie was the baby? Okay.

Hooper: And after leaving Vreelinhsen Avenue, I came here in 1940 I think it was.

Q: You came to this house?

Hooper: The same house.

Q: Okay, what's the address here?

Hooper: 167A. And this neighborhood.

Q: Pennsylvania Avenue.

Hooper: Yeah. And this neighborhood was white. All the way there were houses. All down there were houses.

Q: So across the street now where the engineering department?

Hooper: Yeah, that was houses. The first two houses. There used to be a fellow named Stokes that do the cultural things. Hairdresser and stuff. He lived over there, but he wanted to move badly. And then when Public Service came in and offered to buy his house, he and another older man that lived in the next house, they were anxious to get rid of their houses. So they sold. That's how it happened to be the driveway going like it does. Where you see the driveway that was two houses.

Q: I see. Across the street.

Hooper: And on the corner were houses. Those people wouldn't sell their houses. On the corner was a Jewish store. She sold a little bit of their things until she got to where she couldn't have to. A run down place. And on the corner of Miller Street, there was a Jewish girl that had a store.

Q: So tell me then, the neighborhood as you saw it, mainly about Jewish merchants around in this area.

Hooper: Well, we had some Jewish merchants. Right down on Vreelinhsen Avenue we had the Borox Furniture Company. Right there. And up on the corner we had a little corner A&P store, just like the corner stores now.

Q: Were black people working in these stores?

Hooper: Did they work in, there were some people black work in Borox. I don't remember A&P. Cause I just talking to one of the principals of the school, and she grew up on Miller Street. And he mother and I, she and I used to meet and talk a lot when they were in school. She went to school along with my sons. And we used to meet and talk about wondering how we was going to get money to send them to college.

Q: How were you treated? Do you remember how you were treated going into these stores?
How were you treated as a customer?

Hooper: We were treated nicely. They treated us very nice. Now I moved in this house, when we moved in this house, we moved on our hands practically. The house was in a nasty state, very run down.

Q: Which house was run down?

Hooper: And the man wanted, they wanted, wouldn't rent it to anyone.

Q: This house?

Hooper: This house. So I talked to the real estate agent and told him I had to leave where I was because it was too much confusion. People on the second floor played cards half the night and left the door open. And they accused my children of doing. And so the landlord and I weren't getting along too well because of the children.

Q: That's Vreelinhisen Avenue.

Hooper: And on that corner and down on first floor was a tavern. So I was looking for a place. And the house was fourteen hundred, fifteen hundred dollars.

Q: This house was?

Hooper: He told me that if I would paint the inside, he'd let me have it for fourteen. So I did. And when we moved in, on one side was Irish only and the other side was English. The Irish people put their place up for sale right then.

Q: The Irish did.

Hooper: Irish. But the English people were beautiful. Used to come and take my daughter over the fence and just make herself dirty, she was outside playing. And I said, oh, you can't take her over there because she has to be washed. That's all right. We'll clean up. So they'd wash her face and everything. And the mother was just. So she would be on the porch on a lot and then she'd keep Theresa out there with her.

Q: Do you remember their names?

Hooper: Smith.

Q: The English people Smith. Now the local stores.

Hooper: And they lived there for a long time afterwards. And they were very nice to us during the depression years, the years when you couldn't buy meat in the store. That reminds me.

Q: Okay, we'll take a pause here so you can check your pot. I smell something cooking.

{Interruption} Your pot wasn't burning, was it? No. Okay. Well, we're going to continue.

We were talking about back during the times of the Depression you were saying that there wasn't meat available and that's.

Hooper? No, you couldn't buy meat. And my neighbor --

Q: The Smiths. The English people.

Hooper: Yes. Mr. and Mrs. Smith. The family had, most of them had moved, but the mother died. And most of them had moved. And he had married, the young man had married, not the father. This is one of the children got married, and he and his wife continued to live there for a

long time. And they would like, she would sell them I guess, on Rte. 27 at the, we used to call it the footlong hotdog place. And he knew people that generally could, you know, how people know where they can always get into something, get what they need. Anyway, he knew someone that he could get his meat through. So like they buy a leg of lamb. They cook it maybe. They would always cook it cause it was always. And then cut what they wanted off of it to eat and give the rest of it to us. Holidays come, bought presents for the kids. Beautiful people. They were English.

Q: Let me ask you something about, just the area stores. Did the stores give you credit, the local stores give you credit for.

Hooper: Credit for?

Q: Did they give you credit to buy things or did you have to pay?

Hooper: I didn't buy anything. I had a store in the Central Ward that I had gone to when I lived in the Central Ward. And we used to have what you called books. Like take this book to the store. I want to buy things. I buy what I wanted to buy and put it in the book. Then when I got the money, I'd go pay it. Cross off what you paid. But we had books. When I lived on Vreelinhsen Avenue there was a, have you met Tucker?

Q: Tucker:

Hooper: Rose Tucker.

Q: I don't believe I know her.

Hooper: The neighbor. It's a wonder Theresa hadn't introduced you to her. Her mother died and then her father had two, moved into the house with these two elderly people. I don't know whether they were relatives of the family. And she had a, they lived down the street on

Vreelinhsen Avenue. I lived on the corner. And the grandfather always used to go down to the market cause down here below Broad Street and Carter Highway down in there is where all the vegetables and stuff came in. That market, used to go down, the old man used to go down there. And he would, you know, how they give him the cabbage and beans and stuff like that, and he'd get a lot of that, and he'd bring it back up here to the house, and he would divide with me. He always gave me some of the fresh vegetables. And then when they'd get in tight spots, they didn't have a book to go to the store, I'd lend them my book to buy meat. Finally, the family continued to live there, and this old lady and old man were doing everything they could for the children. And they became very close to us and still are close to us. One morning the father got up to go to work and dropped dead. And the children were left there with the two old people, and they had to raise them. And Rose went away and she became a nurse. She was supervisor of nursing at the Children's Hospital. She retired from there. She lives up on Parker Street now. The North Ward. But she married an elderly man and I understand he helped her to go to college. I think even before they were married, I think he helped her. She wasn't in college when she married. She was finished. Ad she went to North Carolina, and what college I don't remember where she went, but she went for nursing. She became a nurse, and then came back here and eventually they were married. And she, after they lived there, she did quite well for herself. Beautiful woman.

Q: So this was a result of your family kind of helping this family. You're saying this is a result of your knowing that family for many years back and helping them.

Hooper: From exchanging vegetables that he was bringing. I'd let them use my book to get meat. Things like that to live. And that was Vreelinhsen Avenue. That was before I moved down here.

Q: I want to talk a little bit about experiences that you've had. If you have anything to say about it, experiences that you've had remembering the south and how they were new experiences that. Comparing the south to Newark. As far as, say eating habits. Did the food, the kind of foods that you were eating there, did they really change that much when you came to Newark?

Hooper: Not to me. Because I was one of those people that always ate most anything. And, of course, like you said, they used to get peas and beans in the hull, all you had to do was just shell them. Just like you do now. Buy then, used to buy in the hulls and shell them and cook them like you want to. And then they had, like I said, the greens. They didn't have many collard greens. But they soon became famous. And I was so surprised, but that was one of the main serving dishes that we had.

Q: And then it became famous here in Newark.

Hooper: When I went to Germany, when I saw collards, I said, oh lord, they have collard greens over here in Germany.

Q: When did you go to Germany?

Hooper: Huh?

Q: When did you go to Germany?

Hooper: I don't know. Hah. Girl, you know I've been around.

Q: We'll talk more about your travels a little bit later. Comparing the south to Newark, what about the way people dressed? Did the people here dress differently from?

Hooper: I couldn't tell that much. Only thing down in the south the kids used to go without shoes a lot.

Q: Was that a rooster I heard crow just now? Was that a rooster crowing? There are chickens. That's a rooster isn't it?

Hooper: Oh yeah.

Q: What's a rooster doing here, 1996? Is that your rooster?

Hooper: No.

Q: You hear it crowing?

Hooper: It's George's.

Q: Oh, but there is a rooster in the backyard. We'll take a break now. So you said, it's that rooster still crowing. And what else do you have back there?

Hooper: I don't have anything. Lewis has two hens and a goose.

Q: Oh my goodness. And a goose.

Hooper: I told him they are going to put him in jail. I said, because when they come here, I don't know a thing about them. [Laughter] They're eating eggs in there the hens lay.

Q: Oh, so you get the fresh eggs.

Hooper: Fresh eggs from him.

Q: Oh my lord, yeah.

END SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

Q: Catherine J. Lenox-Hooker and I'm continuing the conversation. And the correct date is

March the twenty-ninth, 1996. I'm still here in my first session with Mrs. Willie Belle Hooper. And we left off talking about, actually the little, what was so humorous about the rooster crowing outside. Sort of was like our ending of the last tape. But I want to continue just talking about some of the things that were similar in Newark as they were in the south. Just tell me some of your reactions to some of the questions I have about how certain things were happening here in Newark. What about celebrations, holidays?

Hooper: We celebrated all holidays.

Q: Was it similar to the way you did it in the south? What about Christmas?

Hooper: Christmas. Yes. To give them, my kids gifts for Christmas.

Q: That was the English.

Hooper: The Smiths.

Q: But they weren't. It was really the same way that you did in the south for the most part.

Hooper: Well, they just gave them to us. Because, you know, being of a different race, and this neighborhood was filled with all kinds of races. We had Italians, there were some Dutch people, Chinese, everything. Miller Street School was a mixture. Every kind of people.

Q: So your children went to Miller Street School.

Hooper: They all went to Miller Street School. I went to night school there.

Q: You went to night school?

Hooper: Yeah.

Q: Was that, at Miller Street School, was this an award you received? The Miller Street School Distinguished Alumni Award.

Hooper: They had, they celebrated, had all these people come back. The mayor and everybody else cause he went there too.

Q: Oh Mayor Sharpe James did?

Hooper: Yeah. He spent many a day in this house.

Q: So would you call him, remember I was asking about your extended family. Can you name some of the people who came here a lot? This is probably some of your children.

Hooper: Came her a lot.

Q: No. You were saying he spent many a day here. Were there a number of other people that we might know and remember that were frequent visitors to your home here?

Hooper: Well, when you go downtown, most of them visited here. If they didn't do it when they were little, they did it after they got up. Because my children being great athletes, that made a difference. So it see like there's an article on Arthur when he. Did you see that?

Q: Yes. When Arthur.

Hooper: It was in the paper.

Q: When Arthur Hooper had the auditorium named after him.

Hooper: But then he was voted into Hall of Fame for Newark.

Q: It's wonderful. You must be very proud of your children, their accomplishments.

Hooper: He and Wilbur were great athletes. I put that back up. For Central High School.

Q: He and Wilbur went to Central High. Tell me something, as far as customs, did people do a lot more drinking here, more smoking here, taking snuff and chewing tobacco. I mean, were these things that came from the south that you continued, that were continued here.

Hooper: More smoking was done with cigarettes. Because in the south, people couldn't afford to buy the cigarettes. They used to take tobacco and beat it fine, role it up in paper and smoke it. Because they couldn't afford to buy cigarettes even though the farmers grew tobacco. That's another experience I had.

Q: What's that? Growing tobacco, working in tobacco.

Hooper: Working in the tobacco fields. Chewing tobacco, standing around and sit around the barn and chew tobacco.

Q: So you never smoked it?

Hooper: I never smoked. Never wanted to. Light the cigarettes for my husband as we'd drive along, but I never smoked.

Q: When you say drive along, you mean when you came to Newark?

Hooper: And down in the south. I drove in the south. I used to drive to school. I lived three miles from where I was teaching.

Q: And you still drive today. Isn't that your black car outside?

Hooper: I still drive.

Q: Let's talk about traditional medicines. Did you find that people relied on home remedies or?

Hooper: They did. We used all kinds of home remedies. Because the more herbal things.

Q: Do you remember some of the herbs?

Hooper: And once a year, the lady that lived across the road from me not too far. In fact, the lady is in my husband's family. She used to make me a great big, I don't know what she called it, but make it in a bottle some kind of herbs. Make it every year for me.

Q: What color was it?

Hooper: Color?

Q: What color?

Hooper: I don't remember.

Q: Were these roots?

Hooper: But she used to make it for me every year.

Q: What was it good for?

Hooper: Most anything she said.

Q: You drink it?

Hooper: I drank it because I felt proud of her. And when she'd bring it to me, and I'd thank her. Instead of me curtsying, she did.

Q: Instead of?

Hooper: Curtsying, making a little bow.

Q: On, I see, a little bowing. Well, she'd do it every year. And then, of course, people used to go into the woods and get sassafras tea. And there's another one we used to get for colds. All the different kinds of teas that they used for certain different things. And they used to go into the drugstore and buy something they call Assifidity. Put it in the cross, and fix it so it would hang and then put a string around it and hang it around the children's necks. It was supposed to help to keep them from having colds and things like that.

Q: So did you do that with your children here?

Hooper: Down in the south they did it. But not here. Then what else they used to do.

Q: What about this whole business of people believing in fixing, the voodoo, and roots and all that? Did that continue?

Hooper: Do what?

Q: What about the whole tradition of, not tradition but belief, in people being fixed and having roots worked on them and all of that?

Hooper: That's what we're talking about, the lady in Charleston.

Q: Yes, you did mention someone.

Hooper: She was a root worker. That's how she lived. That's how she acquired everything that she had, and she had a lot.

Q: Did you find that being the case when you came here? There were people like that here?

Hooper: I didn't find people here like that. I guess it's because I didn't communicate much. Because I didn't know anybody to communicate with. But I imagine they brought it from the south here.

Q: But you heard talk about it?

Hooper: No, I didn't. Those were the black and white down in the south. They believe in that mess. I used to know a lady. Maybe this shouldn't go in the record.

Q: So you were saying with this lady in the south, and I guess to make a long story short.

Hooper: The lady lived next door to us. She said she poured wee wee all around the house.

Q: From the slop jar.

Hooper: Yeah, from the slop jar. Because she said that would keep the roots away. If anybody put a roots down by her house. People were always doing all kinds of things.

Q: Trying to fix others.

Hooper: Trying to stay away from people from fixing them with roots. And they'd pay a lot of money to people to go out to people and to see them and to tell them that they want them to

protect them from roots. They'd go all out. Pay a lot of money. Root workers made a lot of money. People used to travel from here to the south to root workers. Somebody I know that girl up the street from me, said, that's what helped her mother. Cause this man she knew lived, worked roots. The mother went south to him, and he helped her live cause she was sick.

Q: She is what?

Hooper: She's still sick. And I know that I don't know why he did it. I came out of my house one day. Found the eggs all broken where he had thrown the eggs on the house. So they said that they threw them there because my husband was a bootlegger, and he had good trade and they throw it there so that some of the people wouldn't go to him. So many people wouldn't go to him. They'd come to them. So they three eggs on top of the house, throw eggs on your car, oh so much junk. I never got into that junk, but there was plenty of it going on. Awful lot of it.

Q: So tell me. Let's talk about crime and juvenile delinquency. When you came, how was the city then as far as?

Hooper: Children was nice. They always was surprised because they came from smaller towns in the south.

Q: Was there very much problems with crime and all?

Hooper: No. The stores, segregated fountains. You drink on this side, I drink on that side. It's still funny to get. One day I went to get a drink of water, and wasn't anybody looking. So I just tasted the water on the white side to see if it tasted any different from the one on the black side?

Q: Did it?

Hooper: Ain't no different. It's all the same. But all that kind of stuff went on. Back when I took

Theresa back the first time, she didn't want to go back.

Q: She didn't want to go back? Because of what, the segregation?

Hooper: Pretty much. And don't think that we weren't segregated here. We were to a certain extent. Black folks always be segregated. Don't care where they go or where they live. They're always going to be pushed aside.

Q: Why do you think that?

Hooper: I don't think that much. No. That's what the people used to tell me, and I was very active in the Miller Street PTA. Very active. In fact, I became the first black PTA president of Miller Street. But see, when I got a chance, I just went on and just like I didn't have any better sense. And I did everything that I saw other folks done. And when I asked other black people, say I don't have any education. Well, nobody knew that I had ever been a teacher because I didn't come here and tell them. I just acted like everybody else. And when I asked them to go to a meeting or go somewhere, I don't have enough education. When the education had nothing to do with it. I used to always tell people that you have children in school. You have to worry about that. You need to belong to the PTA and be active in school PTA just like everybody else. And, of course, at that time, Martin Luther King Blvd., they called it High Street. All those Jews along there came down to Miller Street School. Doctors and lawyers and everything else. They came on permits.

Q: Permits?

Hooper: Go downtown and superintendent of school give them a permit to come.

Q: Oh because it was out of their district.

Hooper: Cause it was out of their district. Yeah, I took our out of district, and I got a permit. I did all the things that I would hear that they said they do, they would do, I would do them. I had enough nerve to go ahead and do it. Because my children were in school too. It had nothing to do with. I always said to my kids, you sit up in school and don't learn because you have white teachers. We didn't have any black teachers. You sit there and don't learn that's your fault. Because she cannot teach that white boy sitting by you or that white girl sitting by, she cannot teach them unless she teach you. And you listen to what they have to say. That was my motto. I lived on my children about that. And I got Frankie little, I said I know you're glad I made you go to school. Now you're sick, see when you got sick you have something to fall back on. Because if he hadn't gone back to school. Frankie came out of school. He wasn't going to go to college. But I said, I'm not going to make you go. Wilbur was in college, and he kept after Frankie to come. He never kept after Arthur. That was a hard one.

Q: Arthur was.

Hooper: Arthur was a hard one.

Q: School principal and all that, but he was the hardest one.

Hooper: When I get sixteen, I'm quitting. You are? If you out of high school, you may. But you will not. I'm sorry. I said, I'm gonna have a high school diploma. I'm not gonna make you go to college because I had, your father and I have to work too hard to send you. If you don't want it, we're not gonna worry and give it to you. And we didn't. Arthur stayed out of college a whole year. When it was time to go to college, he finished high school. No, no. He wasn't going to no college. Okay, that's fine. But I ain't got a job. His father was a big time builder and he knew that. Chester. He hired. One time I know he had three hundred men working. And he used to have a jeep to run from job to job. And Frankie when Arthur did manage to get out of high school, he was a foreman on his brother's job. So he said he wasn't going to college. I said that's up to you. I told you your father and I are not going to try to strain and send you to college just to

be going. You go because you want to go, not because we make you go. And so he stayed out of college. When Chester's work fell off, he didn't have all those big time jobs. He had jobs, but not big as he had when Arthur was a foreman. Arthur went out and looked for a job, ended up as a janitor in Westfield, I think it was a high school, one of the schools in Westfield. One day he just came home and told me mama I'm going to college, and you don't have to worry about getting me in because I've already talked to the coach. I'm going to get a scholarship. I don't know whether it was basketball or football, but anyway. They were outstanding in all. I said, well, okay. He said, mama just get my clothes ready.

When he went to college, he had clothes. Like he had finished college. Because he had bought those clothes. And he decided to go to school. But I know he thinking about it. Couldn't help.

Q: Getting back to your motto. I really feel that's a very good motto for you. And I'm sure that it's something that your children followed because. The motto that you said that when the white teachers teaching the whites, you have to listen.

Hooper: Yeah. Teacher standing up there teaching the white kid, and you sitting right there by him, and you don't learn. I told them. I used to always tell them. You're not supposed to be, act funny. Frankie had nothing but white friends. Italians mostly. They used to do some devil. Lord, they used to do some things. I was always on his back. But my husband was a hard working man, but he never fussed about education like me. I was kind of like my mother and my father. My father was the one in my family. My mother was concerned and all that, but she didn't live on it and dwell on it like my father did. And I was the one that did it in my family. You got to have an education. You can't play around. I'm sorry. You just got to have it. I lived on that.

Q: Okay now, I'd like to talk to you something about work. What kind of work did you do? You did talk to me about the work that you did in the south, that you were a teacher and what have you.

Hooper: And my mother used to take in washing and ironing.

Q: What were your wages? Do you remember what kind of money you made?

Hooper: No.

Q: Okay. And what was your first job in Newark?

Hooper: My first job in Newark was go out and do a day's work for so much money. They paid you so much money. Cause I go back to around the Depression how much they paid you. I'd go out and serve lunches. People like I'm going to entertain so many women today, I'd have a luncheon. I'd go out and do that. Then I'd go out some days and iron for somebody. Cause I learned their way of methods of cleaning the houses. Because of the fact that the houses here were different from down in the south. And then at that time I was younger, and I didn't go out to work there until I got out of school. When I got out of school, then I went to work as a teacher.

Q: But you did day's work here in Newark?

Hooper: Yeah. I did day's work here in Newark.

Q: Do you remember how much you made?

Hooper: I managed to clean their house.

Q: Do you remember how much money you made?

Hooper: Seven dollars, eight dollars, nine dollars, on up. I used to have a place that I used to go, and the woman had three rooms. So to clean that I only got five dollars.

Q: That was hard work? Was that hard work?

Hooper: Yes, cleaning. You know what it means to clean house. You clean it. And then there was one time, at one time, this was later in years, I went to, out to work in this motel out by the, not far right out here on Rte 22. Then I used to sub for the women that were working [interruption for phone call]. But I would go. They had the regular job and I'd go in and let them have a day off.

Q: Let's pause for the telephone. This concludes part 1 of my conversation with Willie Belle Hooper on March 29th, Friday, March the 29th, 1996. The day it snowed again in Newark, New Jersey. The long, long winter of '96 is about to come to a close. I hope that we can meet in another few days and pick up at this point. We were discussing work, and we'll be talking about work and the various other kinds of activities that you've been involved in. I want to thank you for giving me an opportunity to come to your lovely home and share this afternoon with you. And I look forward to our next visit.

Hooper: Yeah, lovely home.

Q: Yeah, lovely place. This is home. This is full of history. As I look around this dining room and all these pictures and all these great memories. Just, you know, wonderful being here in your company. So I look forward to seeing you next week. We'll plan far enough spending a little more time together. Thank you for sharing.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO; END OF PART ONE OF INTERVIEW

BEGIN SIDE ONE OF TAPE THREE

Hooper: You want to begin, that's all right with me.

Q: Okay. We're going to begin at some point talking about your work. But I let our listening audience know that today is Friday, April the twelfth, 1996. It's a sunny day. It feels like spring finally came to Newark, New Jersey. And I'm sitting home in the lovely home of Mrs. Willie Belle Hooper over at 167A Pennsylvania Avenue in Newark. And we're just sort of relaxing and we'll just have a little conversation today to sort of pick up. This is tape, actually this is the third in the series of tapes that we are doing. And my name is Catherine J. Lenox-Hooker. I'm the executive director of the Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center. And a short-time, but I feel long-time friend of the Hooper family. Well, I just want to say hello Mrs. Hooper. How are you?

Hooper: Good morning. I'm always glad to see you Cathy.

Q: Well, it's good to hear that.

Hooper: You feel like one of my children. I guess I want to own everybody's children because they're black like me. I don't know what it is. But I just love all of them. I went to the movies the other day, and I was standing there talking. And the little boy that let us in to show us and show us where he had to go. He was a little black boy. Well, no little black boy, he's a black man because he's grown. But I will say boy because they're boys to me. And I went over to him and shook his hand and said, I'm very proud of you. And he looked at me, I guess he said, where did this crazy lady come from. I'm very proud of you, I said, because we have so many boys that are going to the dogs. And I said they do not know what old people like me have gone through to try to make it better for all of our boys. And I said, all of our boys, I said, and all of you little black boys. Some of you on the corner, in slavery, because when you are selling drugs, you get a little bit of money. The man that gets you to sell the drugs, he gets the money. Go home and cross his legs while you sell it to your friends, and they go out into the streets kill somebody if they don't have enough money to pay for the drugs that they have. Steal from anybody, especially seniors because they thing they have money, and they do not have money. They don't have sense enough to know that they're living on a fixed income. Whatever money they get, that's what they have to live on. They can't work for it. And when you boys will go out and work, like I see you working, I'm very

proud of you. And I want you to keep it up. And tell other boys what you are doing. Tell them, don't think that they can't find a job. Because they'll find a job whether they like it or not. And I said, I'm telling you that you're doing good. Because if you were doing bad, I'd tell you the same thing. But I want you to know that we appreciate your good things. All the good things that you are doing, we appreciate it. We had a hard time.

Q: You were saying, when you started off, you were saying to him and to me earlier about your being a crazy woman. Tell me something, you said there was an occasion just a few nights ago. You were sitting watching in your son Willie's hospital room. You were sitting there watching a basketball, a girls basketball team. And you shared some information about some of that craziness that you used to have. What was that all about?

Hooper: Cause I wanted to do all of those things. And it was really fun to me to be able to go out there and play ball because.

Q: Where was this?

Hooper: When I was a girl.

Q: Where?

Hooper: In Florence, South Carolina. Wilson High School. It was fun to me because the boys always had played ball. My father played baseball, not professional, but he played baseball there on a baseball team. And I loved it. So when I got a chance to become a baseball, I mean a basketball player, and our teacher organized the basketball team, I was one of the first ones to say, I want to play, I want to play.

Q: And you played?

Hooper: And I played, and I became captain of the team. And I was a real basketball player. I was the talk of the town. Have to remember I needed something. I needed new pair of bloomers or a middy blouse, as they used to say. We used to have a little boy across the street used, never could say middy, he'd say minny, minny blouses. So whatever I needed, my mother told my father, cause my mother didn't work. Whatever I needed, my father said, get it. He said, because every day I go over Florence, somebody's always telling me about your daughter playing ball. And he said, I have never seen her play ball, but I'm going to see her because that's all I can hear how well she plays. And I'm gonna say, yes, she can have them. Told my mother, yes, she can have whatever she needs to play with.

Q: Do you think because you played ball so well that that's why your sons did so well at it? They had it in their genes.

Hooper: Well, they could have had it in their genes. The ball was in their genes whether it was basketball or baseball because my mother played ball. Cause I just loved it. Then we would travel as basketball players. We didn't have buses. But taxi drivers in the city would take us. The school would get them to different towns to play ball. And, of course, as girls growing up we really had fun. It was a lot of fun to us. We were sing and talk and play as we'd go along riding in the bus, in the taxi, to whatever town. Then we would take us with us the basketball team, the debating team and the chorus. Of course, I belonged to the chorus because I sang. All my life I was in some kind of chorus. From a little tiny person. My father played the organ by ear. And it didn't make any difference. People used to go out for dinners at one another's houses much more than they do now. And wherever I went, I had to sing. My father saw to it that my daughter gotta sing and I was a little tiny thing singing. So I sang all my life. It was really, really something. I enjoyed it so because I was a child. And naturally if people brag on you, you know you enjoy it.

Q: That's right. So do you think that his cobility is something that your children, any of your children, did any of your children ever use cobility, let's put it that way?

Hooper: Did any of your children do what?

Q: Were they into singing or performing or playing?

Hooper: No. No one was into singing, but my daughter went into music. I don't know whether it's because.

Q: This is Theresa Marshall? Theresa Hooper Marshall?

Hooper: Yes.

Q: Your daughter.

Hooper: She was about five years old. She played everything in this house. Everything but the piano. Everything. And as I said, when I was in the south, I played the organ because that's all we had those days. We had the organ. My father had organ. I took music lessons. And as I said, I sang. And that days the schools were all so different. We had a assembly every morning. We went to school, and everybody went into the assembly. We not only sang, but we had the Scripture read to us. We even learned Bible verses as much in school as we did in church. And we all sang, and we should never forget lift every voice and sing. Because we sang it every morning. It was not God Bless America or My County Tis of Thee. It was not. But we sang our National Anthem every morning. Every morning. And we lined up outside, and we went in and our classes went in in order. Not jumping all over the place. We went in in order and we sat and we listened to whatever was said to us by the principal or whoever was in charge.

Q: Well, when you speak about the principal, because of your early training, was that why you had an interest in becoming a teacher?

Hooper: No I always wanted to be a teacher. From a baby on, ever since I could remember. And

if I couldn't be the teacher, I couldn't play. Let's play school. I be the teacher. Willie Belle, you can't be the teacher. Well I don't play then, you all play.

Q: My goodness. Well tell me, before you became a teacher, before you left the south, did you work there? What kind of work did you do in the south?

Hooper: Well, I told you I left. My father got in trouble, and I left my home town.

Q: Okay, but you were still in the.

Hooper: That's where we had all been. That's where I took the piano lessons. And then when we left there and went to Georgia, I just always wanted to be a teacher. I am not one of those people that went into teaching because that was the only thing that I could do. I went into teaching because I wanted to.

Q: So you taught in the south.

Hooper: I taught in the south. Eight years.

Q: Now where did you teach?

Hooper: My first job was a little place outside of Lake City, South Carolina. That was my first job.

Q: And you did what?

Hooper: I taught there one or two years. And then I decided I wanted to be close to home. And I started looking for another job. And I found a job at a place they call. Isn't that something?

Q: It'll come back to you. Well, tell me, were you teaching kindergarten, first grade, third grade?

Hooper: Taught them all.

Q: Taught them all. Okay.

Hooper: A one room school with a great big pot belly stove in the middle of the room. Took a great big pot from home and carried to school and make cocoa for the kids to drink at lunchtime. But the heating was done by that big potted stove. Children went out in the woods and cut the wood and brought the wood and put the wood in. Unless some of the trustees decided they be smart enough to help the children out. That's how we had our fire. And, but what I would do in the morning teach the grades that I could teach them something and have them understand, and the older children would understand too. I'd maybe assign a girl to a class or two or three children, and say you teach, go over whatever I had taught that morning. It was learning and re-learning for them. That's the way I did it.

Q: Tell me, do you remember how much money you made then? Any idea, what kind of money were you earning?

Hooper: Earning thirty-five dollars a month. Take ten dollars of that for room and board.

Q: Save any of it?

Hooper: Save any?

Q: Yes.

Hooper: I didn't save money. I take my money and send it to my mother. Cause my money went home to mama so that she could use it to help the rest of them.

Q: Right. So you worked in South Carolina for eight years before you came to Newark?

Hooper: Before I came to Newark.

Q: Well, what was your first job in Newark?

Hooper: When I first came to Newark, I tried to get in school and I couldn't. Because they wouldn't take me. And they said they were not taking elderly, well, you know, grown people.

Q: Who wouldn't?

Hooper: So, I didn't do anything but stay home with my kids. Every once in a while run out and serve lunches for the Jewish people that entertained in the mid-day. They'd have lunches. And when they invited their guests. It was a learning experience. Because a lot of the cultural things that we did not get in the south as we were not the wealthy southerner, we were the poor kind of southerners. Like the doctors and lawyers and teachers and stuff that had a different kind of culture from us cause we weren't with them. So it was a learning experience for me. I never forget that one day I was setting a table. She was a lady, but I was right, had me right there. And she said, she took the celery top and cut them off, stuck them down in dirt and things and said those are little trees. She called them. Whatever she put it in. They were little trees. Just for decoration. All those kinds of things, you know, that I knew nothing about. I never thought of. I learned. And, of course, people that knew me, they didn't know me as a teacher. But they just thought that I was intelligent enough not to go out and serve lunches and go out or clean houses. But, see, I wasn't thinking about what they thought. They thought it was a disgrace, and I thought it was an honor because I had to educate my children.

Q: Do you remember what they paid you?

Hooper: Paid me sometimes five dollars, three dollars, all kind of dollars like that. That's what I

got. I remember I used to go and clean this three room apartment for five dollars and car fare. It didn't take me all day to do it, but I could go there and do it for these two Jewish ladies. I have a chair in my bedroom now that she gave me. Like I said everything in my house is old. She gave me this chair. I don't know whether it was her father's chair or somebody's chair.

Q: But this was in Newark? The woman lived in Newark?

Hooper: Right there on Mont Avenue.

Q: Mont?

Hooper: Right there in East Orange on Mont Avenue. I even worked for the Hollanders, I'd do the Hollanders first. I went and done her house several times.

Q: He's the florist here in New York? You were saying, who were the Hollanders? They.

Hooper: Furriers.

Q: Oh, furriers. I see.

Hooper: And then I, you copying this.

Q: What?

Hooper: All this. Oh, you're taping it.

Q: We're taping it.

Hooper: Oh bless you heart. Excuse me for being so dumb.

Q: No.

Hooper: Yes. I did that. What I used to do instead of staying home for lunch with the kids, I put the kids in school, give them all twenty-five cents for lunch. Or if I had a dollar, I'd give them a dollar. How many I had to give, I'd give them a quarter and they'd eat lunch in school. And by the time they got out of school, I was home. I can never forget. It was so funny. Sarah Vaughn used to go with my older son.

Q: Go out with Wilbur.

Hooper: With my oldest son Ralph.

Q: Okay.

Hooper: They sang together. She played the piano for him and he sang. They did concerts, did concerts from church to church. And he was paid to sing in the choirs, the different choirs. Like maybe the Second Presbyterian or Grace or any church that, you know, would hire him to sing. He was tenor soloist. I have programs out that I put aside. I've saved some of that stuff. But I have programs when he sang at certain churches. They used him as a fund-raiser because he sang so well. And so his mother, when she made it, I don't know whether you read the book or not.

Q: You mean Sarah Vaughn's, you're talking about Sarah Vaughn's mother, Ada?

Hooper: Ada Vaughn's daughter. Grew up right around here on Sherman Avenue and Dundridge Street. Anyway, Sarah made it. After she had made it well, she brought, took her mother out of that old house that they had, she had grown up in, and bought a house right around here on Avon Avenue, right where the Boys Club is. And she, her mother met me one morning as I was going to work, and she said, to me, Mrs. Hooper, where are you going this time of morning? I said where are you going? She told me where she was going. I said, well, I'm going to work. She

said, work! I said, yes. She said, nothing works but fools and mules. I said, well, I must be the mule because I'm not a fool.

Q: My goodness.

Hooper: Well, I told her that I told her that either fool or mule. I must be the fool because I'm going to work. Now, as I said, my daughter wanted to play the piano. So she played everything, everything, everything. And I said, well, I'll see if she can't get lessons. There was a lady named Mrs. Reed who was very interested in singing and choirs and so forth. And she was always organizing something. Of course, I sang in a group choir that she had. And then she'd take the children and she'd do things with them, and she also gave piano lessons. So I finally enrolled Theresa in her group. And she took her, and she said, she can't work with the group. Why? She's too far advanced. She needs private lessons. And we went into a discussion as to how much it would cost for her to get the lessons. So I said, I'll make an attempt to try to enroll her in a, you know, private lesson. So I gave her private lessons Miss Reed her name was. And she used to take a group, and she'd have programs with them. A Christmas program, all kind of programs. She had it at some church or some school or something like that. Especially holidays. But she always had a group of children in her house. She lived in Wright Street. So she started Theresa off playing the piano. Theresa stayed with her until, and then she got another teacher in to help her because she had so many children. We didn't pay much, but we paid something.

Q: Sure.

Hooper: I can't remember what it was, but I know it wasn't much. That's where my daughter got her start with piano. And she went on to another lady. And she finally ended up piano lessons with Mrs., Lord have mercy, Cavenish. Mrs. Cavenish. Plays, while my time, down on Thomas Street. Old Mt. Zion.

Q: Old Mt. Zion.

Hooper: So we went on in Mt. Zion then. And, of course, I began singing with the choir, gospel chorus, when on Thomas Street. I didn't go to church too much because half the time I didn't have anything to wear. I had so many children. By the time I got them dressed, I didn't have anything to wear myself. So I didn't go too much. But when I did go, that's what I did. I sang in the choir, the church choir, gospel chorus.

Q: Okay. We talked about other jobs that you had. You worked sort of like as a caterer or caterer's helper. You cleaned various homes and apartments. What other jobs did you have?

Hooper: Oh that's all I did. I used to have.

Q: Okay. I'm leading to when you began to teaching. So what lead up to that?

Hooper: Anyway. I took, after Theresa wanted to play the piano and I didn't have one, and didn't know how I was going to get one, I picked up the paper and I saw an ad in the paper for the piano. Weren't much. Ten dollars or something. Anyway it was an old Confederate soldier in Irvington that had it. So I had missed the boat because my father had a old player piano, and at that time I couldn't pay to have it moved. And to the piano I don't know what happened, whether somebody got it. But anyway, I finally ended up buying this same old piano for ten dollars I think it was.

Q: The one right there?

Hooper: The one right there. And then we bought it. And somebody moved it. I don't remember how we got it home, but we got it home. But that's the piano that my daughter learned to play on. And it's been in the family ever since. So got the piano and got it all tuned up and everything so she could have it to practice on because as I said Miss Reed said she was too advanced to work with a group. She had to work by herself. So she started piano lessons very early, about six years old or something. And she took piano lessons from Miss Reed and then she had another teacher that worked with Miss Reed, cause she did most of her private children. And

from that then I got Miss Cavenish. And Miss Cavenish used to come and give her lessons. In the meantime, all of my children had some kind of music. Miss Reed had singing. I can see them sitting under the Christmas tree now singing at Christmastime. She had them all working. And finally, when they got in school, Chester played the saxophone, which lead him on through life until even when he was in the Army. He didn't go anywhere. He stayed in place with the special service band. Man used to come here from the school and give him lessons. Wilbur had violin lessons for a while. Arthur tried to take trumpet, but he had trouble with his left hand. And I didn't, wasn't able to get him a left-handed trumpet. So he had, that's where he missed. Frankie and Jimmie went with Theresa sometimes for piano lessons, but they didn't do anything really with it. She's the only one that did something with it. And she became leader of the band in school. And she did all of the tuning of the instruments for the teacher and everything. And Miss Cavenish came here and gave her her music lessons. Which she learned all of that on that little old raggedly piano in there.

Q: Now when did you begin working?

Hooper: Now with me in school. Very active in PTA. I was, but I became the first black PTA president of Miller Street School. I think I have a program down there somewheres. If you decided you want to see it, I'll show it to you. And my daughter was a teacher, Chester's wife. She graduated as a teacher. You know Dot?

Q: Yes.

Hooper: Well, Dot is Chester's sister-in-law. And they both went to college, and this was this college that. I don't know what it is. Can't recall it right now. But it folded the end of last year.

Q: Was it? You're talking about. Where was it located?

Hooper: It was located, probably in East Orange.

Q: Iona. Was that the name of the school?

Hooper: What?

Q: Iona College. Maybe I have it wrong. No. No. I know what you're talking about. I'll get the name of it. I'll get the name of it for you. I have it confused with something else, but I know what you're talking about.

Hooper: Over in west. Excuse me. [sneezing] Started that again.

Q: What are these allergies? Must be this time of the year.

Hooper: I don't know. I had it for years.

Q: You want to take a pause.

Hooper: You know, I was going crazy with my nose, sneezing and carrying on. Well, anyway, they graduated from there. Marion began subbing. Dot advanced farther than Marion did as far as the teaching was concerned. Marion taught at Southside for a while, but she was not a regular teacher. They used to have what they call permanent subs. Teachers that taught, carried their class along, kept records and everything just like the other teachers, but they didn't get the benefits and the pay.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE THREE; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE THREE

Q: As a permanent sub.

Hooper: As a daily sub.

Q: As a daily sub. Okay.

Hooper: So she asked me why didn't I work? Said I didn't know I could. She said, all your credits you can work. She said, in Elizabeth they pay fourteen dollars a day. So I grabbed it.

Q: Yeah.

Hooper: And I went over there. And I would have become a teacher in Elizabeth, but the supervisor, whatever she was, I don't think she cared that much about me. Because I was doing quite well. She never did give me credit. She'd always, every time she'd come to visit the school, she'd find fault. So one day I went to PTA meeting, and the president, a Jewish lady.

Q: PTA meeting where? I'm sorry. Where was this PTA meeting?

Hooper: Parent Teachers Association.

Q: Where?

Hooper: At Miller.

Q: At Miller. Okay.

Hooper: So we were sitting talking. She said she went to school and she said she taught right there. And I said, where? Nosey. And she said, subbed at Miller. I said, well where did you enroll at school? She said at a, you know, teachers on Broadway. I said, you did? When I went there, they wouldn't enroll me. They said they don't take adults at that time. She said, well, they accepted me, and I'm going to school there. And she said, I enrolled as a sub. I said, oh yeah. I didn't tell her anything else. I went on and enrolled myself. That's how I got started subbing. So they told me, well, why would you go all the way to Elizabeth, different teachers would come and

talk to me. And there were some of them were my children's teachers. Why would you go all the way to Elizabeth to sub when you can do it here and make more money? I said, I didn't know I could. So sure enough I went on downtown. You had to go downtown then. It was different from what it is now. And I signed up and everything, and they called us from downtown. They didn't call you from the school. And I started getting calls. And I went to the school and worked. But I always used to say no to Robert Treet. Because people told me it was so bad. And I wasn't going to go there and work. I said, not me going somewhere if the children are bad and I may can't manage them. So I wouldn't go.

So one morning they called me, and something said, you better go over here because after a while they say, no, they're not going to call you. So I went on over there. When I got there that morning, I met teachers that I knew. Basketball coaches, coach, the football coach. And they were all, Mrs. Hooper here. Yeah. Mrs. Hooper. Yeah. Cause of Arthur and Wilbur because they were great athletes at their school. So I had more people come to see me, and I started working there. And every day nearly I was there, the principal would come visit my class. I didn't know why. I said to myself, why would he visit my class when I'm not a permanent teacher? So he kept coming. I didn't ask him. I just wondered. So after a while, he told me to come very morning. He said, Mrs. Hooper, he said, you're not busy. Come every morning and take whatever classes, whatever class is open. So I'd go in and I'd teach music. See me dragging the record player around with some records. I'd teach music. I'd teach gym. Anything that was vacant I taught. If it was art, I wasn't no artist. I taught it that's it. So finally one morning I called and told them I won't be this morning. I'm not coming in today. And I never will forget it, I was out there digging in my flowers out on that side of the yard. The phone rang and I answered it. And he said, Mrs. Hooper? I said, yes. He said, Dr. Pepper. I said, Dr. Pepper. I thought I'd done something. He said, you're not. I said, no, I didn't work today. I told him why I didn't come in.

He said, yes. He said, but you know what I'm calling you for. I said, no, I do not know. Well, we are going to need a new teacher and you are the one that I think could take the place. I said, a permanent teacher? He said, permanent sub. You can't be a permanent teacher until you pass the exam. He said, I want to know if you would take it. He said, the vacancy is here. We

are adding a teacher, he said, and I want you to take it. I said, I was shocked. This is why the man has been following me around all the time. So then he explained to me that they were going to give the teacher an extra chance, an extra hour or something, and he wanted me to relieve that teacher at that time to teach whatever she was teaching at that time. He said, you think you would like it? I said, I love it. That was first and second grades.

Q: Do you remember what kind of money you were making?

Hooper: What?

Q: What was your salary then?

Hooper: About forty-nine thousand.

Q: Forty-what.

Hooper: No.

Q: Whoa!! [Laughter] I'm talking about then. When was this, when you got this job, back in?

Hooper: Theresa had never gone to college. Now I gotta think. I told you years I don't keep in mind.

Q: No I understand. Do you remember at the time what was happening in the county? Who was president? I know you'd been living here. I'm just trying to get some sort of a date.

Hooper: I don't know.

Q: All right. All right. So, she hadn't gone onto college you're saying. So it would have been

sometime in the.

Hooper: I can go back. It must have been about fifty-nine, fifty-something like that. Cause I mean I began working in Newark about fifty-nine.

Q: Okay. And.

Hooper: So I went in. So I had to relieve each teacher at a certain time. Teach a certain thing. Maybe it was science. One of the teachers had an idea of a science project that was out of this world.

Q: What kind of project was that? You said you did a science project that was out of this world.

Hooper: We did some science projects.

Q: Oh you did some. Oh, I see.

Hooper: This teacher and I were together. Cause I had to get on her about this. Haven't seen her for a while. And, we went from science without, and with the cause of her being there. Well, I wasn't really the cause, but I encouraged her to go to.

Q: Her name.

Hooper: Curry.

Q: What's the first name?

Hooper: Oh.

Q: Well, that's okay. She's still living in the Newark area?

Hooper: Yeah. But she doesn't work here. She works in Plainfield I think. But anyway, she and I just worked very well together. I worked all right with the rest of them, all the first and second grade teachers, but she and I used to do the project that was worthwhile talking about. I can't remember what it was, but I just know everybody talked about it. Anyway.

Q: What were your working conditions like? Did you enjoy?

Hooper: What?

Q: Did you enjoy working over there?

Hooper: Oh. In fact, there was people that told me, people that told me that the place wasn't fit to work in. But I remember I went back to work about 59, and as I said, Theresa was getting ready, that's why I felt I could do it. She was getting ready to go off to college. I stayed there, got the nicest grades. Finished school, got letter, I guess, the only thing I threw it away, from the principal and everything when I passed the exam. The letter I got from Lee Ingram the superintendent and everything, my salary and everything was on it.

Q: What was your salary then once you passed the exam.

Hooper: I think it was forty-nine.

Q: Four thousand, nine hundred.

Hooper: I think so.

Q: Okay.

Hooper: But anyway. Had that somewheres too. [Laughter] But I don't keep them.

Q: Okay.

Hooper: I have remember. I have to go back and figure when was my children born. That's the reason why I got to jot it down the Bible and in another book too so they can see for themselves.

Q: We'll take a pause for this call. [Interruption for phone call] Okay we were talking about your days of teaching at Robert Treet. Now, how long were you there?

Hooper: After I finished school, I became a permanent sub. Okay, after I got my degree.

Q: That's a degree in?

Hooper: I became permanent sub.

Q: Back in 1959 you said.

Hooper: 59 I think it was. And then I said I was going to leave. And I was going to Paterson but they weren't paying any more than they were paying. So I wasn't going to travel all the way there. I could have become, the only difference I would been made a permanent teacher. I wouldn't have to pass an exam. I had to take an exam here. So I took the exam a couple time, but one or two points off nearly every, the times I took it. So then they wavered the written and gave an oral exam. And I took the orals. And the boy that interviewed me said, oh if they had had teachers that could pass the oral like I did, they would have been all right. But I had worked in River Street School as a permanent sub in the first grade. I don't know. I just got tired of being in one school, and I thought I'd like to come closer to home, and I transferred to Miller. And when fall came and they started to organizing the classes, the principal said, he had several children that had come into the school that had never had kindergarten. Of course, in those days a lot of children didn't have

kindergarten in the south. I don't know whether you went to kindergarten

Q: Yes I did.

Hooper: A lot of children at that time didn't have kindergarten. Where did you go to kindergarten

Q: Let's see. I went to Motts Elementary School up in Washington, D.C.

Hooper: You what?

Q: Christian Mott.

Hooper: Where is that?

Q: Oh it was on Fourth and Bryant Street in Washington, D.C.

Hooper: Oh. You went to school in Washington.

Q: I'm from D.C.

Hooper: Oh well, --

Q: Yeah, we had kindergarten.

Hooper: That's the difference. You didn't come from way down.

Q: Pardon me. I'm sorry. [Interruption for phone call] Hold on a second.

Hooper: When I went into school and it's so funny that we had two teachers there that had taught

in the south, and they knew what was happening just as much as I did. They didn't send kids to school down there until they were six years old. And at six years old, you didn't go in no kindergarten, you went to first grade. And so they knew as much as I knew. So when the principal asked which one of us, which one of the three teachers, would take this group of children that were six years old. Oh no, I can't teach no. I already know. You know how people are just bragging about what they can do and they've done it. You know, it isn't like you haven't done something. I said, well, I'll take them. It's all right. He said, well, you can play with them some, have them play. And then, of course, used to play. I said, okay, thank you. Took that first grade, and honey, that first grade is so til the people were shamed that they didn't take it. And when I went to take my oral, that he was on the board. So he told me, please tell them what happened to the first grade you took at my school. I said, what happened to them. He said, they went to second grade. And he said, how did you do it, what you did? I said, nothing, but teach them. You have to teach them. You can't go to work and play with them. I said, you told me I could play with them to a certain extent. Yes, I could have played with and let them have their games and all. Let them get used to being with other children, but they learned to be with other children and learned too. They had both to do. They could do it. It wasn't like they couldn't do it. They did it in the south. They could do it here. And they were, the children in the south that did not have the chance to be as forward as these kids. I said, they can do it. Every time I'd get a new set of books. How you manage you to get any of that set of books? Ask me all kinds of silly questions. That I just get in there and teach. I don't play with kids. No. I get right in there. See the letters, every time I get a letter from one of the kids that I had up in the pre-school what their mothers are saying about them and their learning. Cause I didn't play. I didn't have time. I told them you didn't come here to play. This is kindergarten, but you didn't come here to play. It being a private school too.

Q: What school is this? What school?

Hooper: When I was up there, Christian Academy. This last year.

Q: Oh this last year. You mean the work you did in 1995. Okay, we kind of skipped ahead. You were at the Miller Street School when.

Hooper: Oh well, then I said I don't play with kids.

Q: How long? Okay. How long did you work? Did you continue at the Miller Street School until you retired?

Hooper: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: So you were there about how long?

Hooper: I passed the exam. Stayed there that year. And I asked for a transfer to go back to Robert Treet. And I went back to Robert Treet. And I stayed there until there was all of this confusion with the Leroy James canceling. They came in there running the school. And raised so much cain. I don't know how they got them out. But the principal and the vice principal were white. They got them out of there.

Q: Were they teachers or they were just trying, they were raising cain?

Hooper: Well, Campbell came in.

Q: Oh Campbell this is.

Hooper: Yeah. You weren't here when that was going on.

Q: Which Campbell is this? The former superintendent? Eugene Campbell.

Hooper: Yeah. He and Leroy Jones.

Q: Oh Mary Baraca.

Hooper: Well, they the ones that came in there. They had a room upstairs was the Afro-American Room, which is nothing wrong with that. But you don't take a school and change it all over. They went in there and Campbell wore [?] every morning. And he came in and he spoke Swahili to the kids which they didn't know. Teachers didn't know it either. And all that kind of stuff. He even wanted to change the menu. I'm as black as anybody, but there are certain distances I go. They went through all that changes and everything, and then turn around and come back and start wearing ties and shirts and wanting to be and did become superintendent of schools. How he did it I don't know. But he did it.

Q: What kind of menu? What kind of black menu?

Hooper: I never did get it.

Q: Okay. But they wanted to change the food.

Hooper: They wanted to change the menu. And.

Q: You like the?

Hooper: Tastes good. That's all right honey. And my grandson was in with the whole thing. I stayed there until the school roof fell in. And they had to send us out to different schools, different places, different schools. And when time come for school to close, I was in Avon.

Q: You went to Avon.

Hooper: On Camden.

Q: I'm sorry. Repeat that. You were at the Avon School.

Hooper: I went to Camden instead of Avon.

Q: Camden School.

Hooper: And I stayed there until school closed. And when school closed, our records and everything went back to old Robert Treet. And I think by that time they had changed it.

Q: Changed the name of the school?

Hooper: Changed the name of the school.

Q: To what. Well, South Side became [?]

Hooper: Side South became [?]. This is.

Q: Well tell me this. How long then, did you go back to that school, or where did you go from then?

Hooper: Then when I came back my aide called me and said, Mrs. Hooper, you know they're not going back to Robert Treet. They didn't call it Robert Treet then. But anyway. You're not going back. I said, who said so? I'm a permanent teacher. I go, they can't just throw me out. She said, well, I got it from the minutes. I said, well, if it's in the minutes, it must be so cause they voted on it. So then I said I'll find out Monday. And went downtown Monday, and Mr. Wright, used to be in the school, he was then made principal of. Isn't that funny, can't call the school just now.

Q: That's fine. But what happened?

Hooper: So I went down. And Mr. Wright told me that Mrs. Hooper you should be proud. All the principals wanted you. He said, I told him I was taking you and Betty Robinson and putting you in my organization. I said, how could you throw me out? He said, I don't Mrs. Hooper, but your name was down here, wasn't in any organization at all. I told them you was a first grade teacher that I really wanted. And I was going to ask you if you would transfer and come to me anyway.

Q: How old were you then? How old were you then? I'm just curious.

Hooper: About sixty-five, sixty-six. Somewhere in my sixties. Early sixties.

Q: Okay. So Mr. Wright wanted you to go. Now what school was he? What school was this? Where did he want to take you?

Hooper: I was going to go to Dagaw.

Q: McGraw?

Hooper: D A G A W.

Q: Okay. And that's where?

Hooper: To Dagaw and from there, that's where I retired from.

Q: From Dagaw?

Hooper: Yes.

Q: How much money were you making when you retired? Do you remember? You were making

forty-nine hundred early on.

Hooper: Twenty --

Q: Okay. Up in the twenties?

Hooper: I retired. Wait a minute.

Q: That's a picture of you, up there.

Hooper: My retirement date was 1981.

Q: You retired in 81. Oh, that's fifteen years ago. So you were making something up in the twenties.

Hooper: Yeah. And so I said, well, it's all right with me if you want me. But I said, being a regular teacher if I would have asked for retirement, I would have asked for one to go into the next. I said, because, Arthur teaches at South Street and I wouldn't have to drive in the morning. So, I go with you. And after I went on over there with him and I stayed. It's right. It's all right with me being there with troubles. Campbell, I didn't have troubles, but I just didn't do what he said to do.

Q: What did he want you to do?

Hooper: Everything you did was for the pre-school that they had up there. The African Free School that they had upstairs. Everything. They had a bazaar. They wanted us to make things and sell over there. And the bazaar money was going for that. And I wouldn't let my class. I said, I'm sorry we don't have time for that. We have to make things for ours that we're going to help us to learn. I didn't go into this. And I was as black as everybody else over there, but I just didn't go

in there. Now, if a teacher had a program, and the program was what he liked, like for blacks. Which I did, I had a friendship trip around the world. I think that's the name of the place. And I included all people. And he never saw it. My aide almost had a fit because she thought it was beautiful.

Q: Were these all black children you were teaching, or you had different? What were the races of the children?

Hooper: Yeah, they were black. And we didn't have many Spanish kids. And they were all black. And I didn't try to change them to say that they were anything else other than black, but I didn't go to the extreme with this thing. Because I thought it was wrong to do so. And I just didn't do it.

Q: Were there any strikes while you were working?

Hooper: Yeah. There was a strike. One strike. I can remember slipping in the side doors. Leroy Jones and what's this white fellow that got them. They all had a big mess going.

Q: Alabottom? In North Newark?

Hooper: What.

Q: I don't know. I mean, you said it was in north Newark.

Hooper: Yeah. North Newark. Politicians, can't recall his name right now.

Q: You mean, is he a member of the city council now?

Hooper: He did run for city council. He never did make it.

Q: Okay. There was a strike you said.

Hooper: Yeah. They had a strike.

Q: How long did it last?

Hooper: Didn't last but a few days.

Q: What was the strike over? Do you remember what the issues where?

Hooper: Cathy, you know what?

Q: What?

Hooper: I paid so little attention to all that junk that was going on. It didn't stick.

Q: All right. Were you a member of a union?

Hooper: Yeah. I was representative of the Teachers Union. Not the Teachers Union, the teachers organization.

Q: Oh, National Education Association.

Hooper: Yeah. I was representative in the school for them. I never did join a union.

Q: What were the common occupations of black people, men and women while you were working?

Hooper: What was it?

Q: Yeah. What kind of jobs did you see others around you having, blacks working?

Hooper: In the city?

Q: Yeah. In the city, yeah. What kind of jobs did people do?

Hooper: They worked for Ford, which was very, very outstanding. And what else did they do? They worked for the Post Office. They worked in the school system as janitors and stuff. They worked on the garbage truck, but they were only people that dragged the garbage and threw the garbage. They did not drive trucks. I look at the men now driving, Lord, I know the day when all the drivers on those trucks were Italians or something. They didn't have any black drivers. All were white drivers. If they weren't Italian, they were something else. And let me see, what else did they do. Of course, you know, they swept the streets.

Q: They were street cleaners then?

Hooper: With brooms, no sweepers. They didn't have those. They swept them with brooms. And when the truck came along, you didn't put your garbage out. You let it sit in there, but you let it sit in such a way they could get in there, and they'd go and pull the garbage.

END SIDE TWO, TAPE THREE, BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE FOUR

Q: Mrs. Willie Belle Hooper. My name is Catherine J. Lenox-Hooker, the executive director of the Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center. Today is April the twelfth, 1996, and we're going to be continuing our discussion. Okay, we were just talking about your volunteer activities. What were you just saying to me about volunteering?

Hooper: I've done all kind of volunteer work. Red Cross, Salvation Army, volunteered at school to take the kids places. First time I went to the United Nations it was a volunteer thing. Went to

the bank down on the corner to volunteer to collect money for the PTA. I don't know what we were going to do with it that time, but we were going to give it to the Red Cross or what. But I went down with my little cups to volunteer, and they told me I couldn't. And I can't remember, and come back I had to send one of the Jewish ladies down there cause they wouldn't let me do it.

Q: Oh.

Hooper: Right down that corner.

Q: Where?

Hooper: On the corner of, you know where [?] turns and go into Vreclinhisen Avenue, that big building?

Q: Yes.

Hooper: That used to be a bank there. In fact, there were houses all along here. Nothing along here but houses. We had a cop live down on the corner, where the tavern is. And anything they did volunteer to do, I was there.

Q: But they wouldn't let you volunteer to collect money?

Hooper: Not down in that bank.

Q: When was that? How long ago was that?

Hooper: That must have been about 66, 65, Somewhere along that time. And we would go to things they'd have. The usually go, they didn't work that much hours. In fact, I'm the only person down there that usually got out and get out a lot of volunteer, a lot of school for the school.

Because they were always saying we don't have the education. And I used to always say, cause I never told them that I was a teacher at all. It wasn't their business. I didn't tell them. I was just, had a whole lot of kids in school and that was it. So they said the kids are going places. I was ready. And sometimes I had to get up in the morning and clean up before I leave, but I did. I went places. Everywhere they had to go. Especially if they had to have extra kids to help with the kids, extra people to help with the kids. I was always there. And people said, well, I don't have an education. You don't have to have an education. All you have to do is you got children. When you got children, that's it. That's when you volunteer to help. You not only helping your, helping other people's children, you're helping your own. So I was always there. United Nations, everywhere else they went. I don't care where we went I was there.

Q: I see. Tell me what church do you belong to?

Hooper: I belong to Mt. Zion Baptist Church.

Q: That's the only one that you've been a member?

Hooper: Ever since. We were on Thomas Street, and church so small that it couldn't accommodate the people. We had to stand up. And it was during the wartime when you couldn't buy no materials to build with. We had the little lot across the street. But then they decided to try to move. So we looked all over for churches. Went to, we even looked at St. James. It was too small.

Q: St. James AME at the corner of High Street and Court?

Hooper: Yes. It was on that one too. And we finally ended up on Broadway. A lot of people didn't want to go up there. A lot of people said, go up there among all the white folk. Go up there and you can't do this and you can't do that. They didn't want to go. But the majority voted to go. So I'm not a fighter like that. If the majority voted to go, then I was going. So I went.

Q: What positions did you hold in the church?

Hooper: What did I hold?

Q: Yes. What kind of things did you do at the church?

Hooper: I've been chairman of the school of mission. I was Sunday School teacher. President of the choir, sing in the choir.

Q: So you had a very active church life.

Hooper: chorus. Oh what did I do in the chorus.

Q: I didn't hear you. You were saying?

Hooper: I'm trying to think what I did in the chorus. I don't remember. One of the advisors for BY.

Q: That's the.

Hooper: You know what that is?

Q: It's the Baptist Youth ---

Hooper: Fellowship.

Q: Fellowship. Okay.

Hooper: Yes. I was one of those. And we took the kids and we, you know, we coached them in

the programs and all that kind of stuff. And then took long trips and things like that.

Q: Tell me something. What were some of the ministers of the church?

Hooper: Names?

Q: Yes. Please.

Hooper: When I joined, I joined under Reverend Birch. After Reverend Birch, came Reverend Tucker.

Q: First name.

Hooper: He was very. Oh, you never find a minister like he was. Active. Did everything that we did. If we find that we need to go somewhere, didn't have anybody to drive the van, he did.

Q: What was his first name do you remember?

Hooper: Reverend. What's his name? I have to go back and.

Q: That's all right. We'll get it because you've already mentioned the name of the church.

Hooper: Yeah. Reverend Tucker. And helped to organize the scholarship fund, helped to organize the nursery.

Q: These are things that you did.

Hooper: I did all of that.

Q: And Reverend Tucker, what happened to Reverend Tucker? Reverend Tucker, you were saying, I was asking about the ministers. What happened to Reverend Tucker?

Hooper: Oh, Reverend Tucker left, and then came Reverend Stewart. Then came Reverend Stewart, the minister we have now.

Q: Who were some of the outstanding members, people, members of the church that come to mind?

Hooper: Mrs. Powell, Mrs. Powell, Cary Powell. She became the first superintendent, the first black teacher. She became the chancellor I think.

Q: Who else do you remember that's outstanding member of the church? What other members were outstanding?

Hooper: Her husband was very outstanding. Robert Powell. Her father was on the jury and then deacon.

Q: His name.

Hooper: Epts.

Q: Epts.

Hooper: E P T S. He was very outstanding. And the rest I cannot name them.

Q: Well, maybe some names will come back to you.

Hooper: My mother was outstanding in that she did everything. She was in the missionary, she

was in this, she was in that. And then there was a Mrs., next time, I'll have some more names.

Q: That's okay. Let's talk about some other things. If you think about anything with the church, we can come back to it. What social or cultural activities have you participated in? By that I mean were you a member of Eastern Star or bridge clubs, or literary societies?

Hooper: Yeah. I was Eastern Star. My mother, did I give you her name?

Q: No. Give me her name again.

Hooper: Addie Sanders.

Q: And she?

Hooper: S A N D E R S. Addie Sanders. My mother was very active in church.

Q: You were saying you were a member of the Eastern Star?

Hooper: Yeah. Not Eastern Star, the, well, it's affiliated, but it's not. My mother was the leader of it or she was assistant treasurer or whatever they call them for the United States and Canada. That's my mother up there on the end over there. I was deputy of the children for the.

Q: This is the same organization you're trying to think about?

Hooper: In affiliation with the, with the.

Q: We can come back to that. It'll, you know, things have a way of just, you know, creeping back in. We might say something that jars your memory. What about bridge clubs? Were you a member of benevolent associations? I'm sorry. You were the? Can't hear you since you moved

over, away from the microphone.

Hooper: I was trying. I thought I had them, a program right there.

Q: You were den mother? For?

Hooper: Both my church and for my school. For Mt. Zion and for Newark.

Q: The Boy Scouts of America.

Hooper: Den mother. [pause to look through things]

Q: Okay. Why don't we talk about some other kinds of?

Hooper: Christian Good Samaritans was a group I was president for years.

Q: Was that through the church?

Hooper: No. It was not affiliated with anything. It was incorporated, but the thing of it was it was something that this lady had gone to a funeral. And while at that funeral, she was very upset because the person didn't have any flowers at all. So she decided she would organize something where people would be able to give folk something. And so she organized the Christian Good Samaritans. And it was incorporated. But they had an audience, they had so many people. And, of course, they would give things to different people that needed things. Like if you needed something and they gave some scholarships and they gave some people that were in the hospital and needed money. And they'd give them some money. You know, just wherever it was necessary they would give. And, of course, I was president about ten years for that. And then I. Community organizations I was active in.

Q: What kind of organizations?

Hooper: Neighborhood community. I didn't hold any special office. We just acted in building up the neighborhood. I worked on that lot up the corner, but didn't have any special title. Just came along and worked in the community. But then I went and asked the conservative community to come and help us, and instead of helping, they took over.

Q: What group was that? The Greater Newark Conservatives over on Washington Street?

Hooper: Yeah. Instead of them coming over. See that lot on the corner over there?

Q: Yes.

Hooper: I had it all lined up for the kids. And someone told me that they would help to beautify it. So I called them in, and she came in and took over. Cause see that's her job. See that was not my job. All I was doing was just trying to help the neighborhood kids. I had thought that the lot would be good for the children to play on, and each child could have a little section of his own and grow his own little garden. And then I would have a section where they could sit and read and then we could talk about stories and stuff like that. And I would have the library come out and bring them books, you know, like the --

Q: The bookmobile. Get the bookmobile to stop by.

Hooper: Yes. I'd have them come and do that. I had a nice thing planed for them. But then when I said something about this, then she just took over. And, of course, she's making her job. You can understand why she was doing it. But she didn't help us any.

Q: How long ago was this?

Hooper: Last, two years ago.

Q: Oh, I see. Do you remember her name? She's still the director?

Hooper: I can't remember.

Q: No, don't worry. Don't worry about that.

Hooper: She's still there.

Q: But are they still helping? That's the main thing. Are they still working.

Hooper: They go up there and get those kids, and those kids come down there. They started going to school to get the kids. Now they go up there and get the kids, and they bring the kids down here and they just run all over and jump all over the fence and do all these things. Maybe it's done some good. I don't know. But after she was that way, and wanted to be boss, and I know I didn't have. That was not job. I was just doing it for the neighborhood. I just gave it up. I let her go ahead on in. Run it the way they wanted to. I'm not a fighter. That's my biggest trouble I guess. I don't go out here and fight with people about positions to help. I just go and help wherever I can help. And that's it. And if you're going to be a fight in it, then I'm not in it. I'm out. Because I think that we should be able to work in the community and build it up and make it better without having to have somebody come from downtown and fight with them. Now, I was given the Improved Newark support. That's what that was supposed to have been. I was given a title. You see it up there. One of my plaques up there. Where they presented me a plaque for improved Newark because I'm always trying to do something to improve the condition in our neighborhood.

I went over and asked the man, those big, two stone blocks out there in front of my house. I asked him for them because they were sitting over there doing nothing.

Q: That's across the street where the Sanitation Department has its lot.

Hooper: Yeah. I went over there and asked him for them. And they gave me two. One that I put one on each end of my property. I adopted the lot next to me for the longest. Had a garden and kept it clean and kept flowers growing in front of it for years until they put it up for auction. Went down for auction, this guy's a, I wouldn't call him a racketeer. I don't know what he is. But he's one of the people can get out there and get things, and do what they want to do. And they have bought the two lots up there, and they promised to sell me one of them. And then all of a sudden he changed that he wouldn't sell it. But when this one came up, he had somebody down there to, they ran the lot up so high, they knew I'd never buy it. Started off with three hundred dollars. And, of course, I bought that house in the auction.

Q: The house on the other side of the property.

Hooper: Yes. Yes. I bought it in auction. It was, people had gone in there and stole so much. And I was going in and out of it trying to keep it, keep people out. My son told me you do not need to be going in that empty house. And they kept on me and stayed on me so long about it til finally I said to him, well, the house is just about gone. Anyway, I don't know what the city going to do with it. If they're going to put it in the auction. Cause he was working for the city.

Q: Who's this.

Hooper: Val.

Q: And I said, okay, I'll try to stay out of it. So he kept on asking me. I said, well, I'll buy the house. But I'm not going to pay a whole lot of money. I won't pay over five hundred dollars for it. So he said, well, okay. I said, will you put a pre-bid on it for me? He said, yes. So I gave him three hundred dollars. Borrowed my car to go to work that morning. I said, I give you three hundred dollars, put the pre-bid on. So he did. So it was a bad, hot day. And the people didn't sit

long and they left. So when it came time for him to bid on it, everybody was gone. So was nobody there to bid against him. So he got the house for three hundred dollars. And we remodeled it while I was on vacation. And when I came back, I said to him, well, you bought the property now and remodeled it. I said, took your money and remodeled it. So he said, yeah. I said, well, I don't want you to do it. I said, you collect the rent and pay the rent back and pay them, and pay the mortgage or whatever. So I let him do that for two or three months, and I said, shucks it'll take you too long to get your money back. I said, I'll have to see if I can borrow from somebody, find somebody to lend me the money. So he said, I know somebody that will lend you the money. So I went down there to that black bank.

Q: City Bank?

Hooper: But it's owned by black people.

Q: City National?

Hooper: Right next to the City Hall.

Q: That's the City National Bank.

Hooper: Is it city?

Q: Pazzone is the president.

Hooper: I guess it is. But anyway.

Q: Wiggams was on the board?

Hooper: Yes. That's the one. He borrowed the money. I went down there and signed the paper

and borrowed the money and gave him his money and I paid it off. That's how I got that house next door.

Q: So you kind of touched on it a minute. But the gardens that you would have. You get most of your vegetables out of your garden as I remember.

Hooper: I had a garden right next to that house for years. Until the man, as I said, outbidden me at the auction.

Q: This was recently? When did he outbid you?

Hooper: About three or four years ago. Now, so what did I do. I went and adopted the other lots that was vacant up there, nobody owned. So I have an adopted lot about 161. 161. I adopt that lot. And that's where I grow all my vegetables right there and in my backyard. Took the backyard from the house because I had tenants in there and they never cut the grass. Never cleaned the yard. So Wilbur decided to move in there. Begged me to let him move in there. I said, oh, the people are the kind of people that pay their rent. They don't play. And so he, he would say, no Ma, you don't have to worry about the rent. So he took it. And I hand him the bill. Had a little space in between it and then this lot. I told him put a porch there. Put a porch, open the door so I could go in and out his house if I wanted to and go into the porch. And took the yard and dug it up and made it into part of my garden. Flowers out there. That's how I came to owning that house. But then I persuade the people, try to get them. One thing the Greater Conservative people did was to bring the barrels down. All those barrels. We had to pay for them. But they brought them and they brought the stuff to put in them. So everybody that wanted a barrel could buy one. So I bought several because they're all in front of that man's lot. That's not my lot. That's his. But I put my barrels in front of them. Even though we have a hard time trying to keep them. I see where somebody broke some of the pieces out of that one down there. And somebody broke one up there. I'm going to have to replace them if I want them. So.

Q: As far as other community activities, you, were you involved in any political activities?

Hooper: Political. I was district leader, but they changed our district. I don't understand how they did it. But they didn't tell us anything. We were First and East Ward. Then they took us from the East Ward and put us in the Central Ward. Wilbur and I were district leaders. Then, you know how they changed it back from the Central back to the East Ward, so we are in the East Ward. That's where, where we are now. So I'm not really active, but I used to be active to a certain extent. Cause I said, I was district leader. I was always downtown to the council meetings trying to find out, to see what I could get done for our neighborhood. Which I haven't done since they changed the district leader. Because Wilbur isn't leader anymore. Anyway Wilbur moved after he got married. And then he and I were district leaders, and we were no longer district leaders here. In fact, I don't know who the district leader is. But you need somebody to be so you can go to him and explain and get things done.

Q: Explain to the council you mean.

Hooper: Only thing you have to go to council meeting. Yeah. I go to council meeting. You know I go there.

Q: Yeah. But someone listening to this tape in fifty years wouldn't know that you went.
[Laughter] Let me ask you this. The, you were saying the political activities. Were you a registered Democrat, Republican?

Hooper: I'm a Republican. When I came from the south, we weren't allowed to vote. So we hit Jersey, the first thing they told us, of course, that's what they were told. Black people were told. All black folk are Republican because Lincoln freed the slaves. That was the saying. I know you've heard it.

Q: Yes.

Hooper: I thought you had. So when I registered, I registered Republican. When I got into politics and learned what it was all about, I didn't see that much difference in whether I was a Republican or Democrat as far as I was being helped. So I said, why should worry to change. So I stayed Republican. And I've been Republican every since. I don't go out here fighting and fussing and going on. I'm a Republican and I'm this and I'm that. I don't do that. But I am a Republican and I don't go around and try to hide it. A lot of people are Republican and they don't want people to know. But I am and I said, not but one time I can't vote for who I want to vote for.

Q: That's the telephone. Take a break. [Interruption for phone call] Just kind of wanted an idea whether or not you ever owned any businesses or operated any businesses?

Hooper: No.

Q: No?

Hooper: Not really.

Q: What does that mean?

Hooper: You know, I worked for companies selling this. Mary Kay and all that kind of stuff. I canvased a lot, but not any business.

Q: Okay. Let's talk something about the community, community life. How did you get information on news and news events? I mean, say, thirty, forty years ago when you first came here? Did you read the black newspaper?

Hooper: By word of mouth or by newspapers.

Q: Did you read a black newspaper? Did you read black newspapers?

Hooper: Well, I would read the Afro-American.

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Q: When you moved in this community.

Hooper: In this house. All white. Weren't any blacks. Then my neighbor decided to move right away as soon as he saw us moving in. The house wasn't anything.

Q: Wait a minute. What were you saying, politically what?

Hooper: Politically, we had Bill Stubbs who was a black Republican. And we used to go to a meeting down Charles Street by the park. Every so often to talk about different things that were happening. He was like, [?] what was it. I think his name is in there. I should go in there and see.

Q: This was Bill. How do you spell his last name? So that William L. Stubbs, the Central Ward black Republican County Committee. I see the award on your wall there. What other outstanding blacks did you ever meet or did you hear in Newark? Think of some people?

Hooper: Well, there was him and the central of the. And I was with that group. Leave them open and put them over a little further.

Q: The peanuts.

Hooper: So I can get into them too. And.

Q: Just off the top some names. You may come back with some other names. Let me ask you something else. What do you remember about the police department, fire workers, fire fighters.

Hooper: I don't remember much about them because I didn't keep up too much with them. Because I just didn't have any dealings with them.

Q: I see. Well, let me ask you this. When you or other people in the neighborhood got into what you call trouble or needed help to solve a problem, who did you turn to?

Hooper: I didn't do much. When it came to me. I haven't had to have anybody for help because I'm. And as far as my children were concerned, I told them they'd better stay out of trouble. They better not get into trouble. So I didn't have to go to anybody for help.

Q: Did all classes of black people live around you, near you here? Or was it? What kind of people, black people lived around here as the years went on?

Hooper: People of every kind.

Q: So you were saying that so many of the political leaders that we have in Newark now have been here, sat in front of the TV, sat at your table, what have you. You want to talk about some of those people?

Hooper: When they were growing up.

Q: What were your images of them growing up?

Hooper: Wilbur Parker, [?]. I don't know whether Tucker was in here or not.

Q: I think you had mentioned Bradley. Donald Bradley you mentioned to me before.

Hooper: Yeah. Don Bradley was like one of my children when he went to school. And he lived in an apartment with my children.

Q: I'm sorry.

Hooper: If you noticed, Don Bradley spoke at Chester's funeral.

Q: Yes.

Hooper: And not only that. He and Chester were trying to do something. I don't know what they were trying to do. And he had these white guys down there. And, of course, Chester asked me to go with him. I met him down at City Hall. So then, and Chester was the cause of him being where he was.

Q: Donald said this about Chester.

Hooper: Because he said, when he hit Newark he always had a job. Because Chester was a builder. He was in that construction stuff. And he always had jobs for the boys that come from the college. And they come home, and they always had a job. Maybe he had to fire somebody to give them a job. That's why he said Chester was the cause of him being where he was. Because he couldn't have gone to college if he hadn't had some help.

Q: Wonderful. Were there many black owned stores around here? Or black owned stores that you knew of? What was that, I'm sorry.

Hooper: No. That store used to be a Jewish tavern. But we weren't allowed to go in there. On the corner up there used to be a Jewish tavern. Two corners. Corner of Vreelinhsen Avenue and Vanderpeel Street, one on each corner. But it was for whites. And the one on there was for whites. For years blacks didn't go in there.

Q: Right down at your corner here? Well, did you?

Hooper: As the years went by, the Jewish bar on that corner was sold out to a black guy. And it was black for a while.

Q: What the bar?

Hooper: The bar. Then it was empty. Nobody seemed to go in there and try to do anything with it. Nobody wanted to move it there. The old restaurants and not that many people go in there. They don't stay open. They close it.

Q: So what is it now? The place on the corner, what kind of business is it now?

Hooper: A restaurant now. But there used to be liquor. Used to be a bar.

Q: Who owns it now. Who owns the store on the corner?

Hooper: Well, I know the fellow that lives there now. He bought that house in the auction too.

Q: Is he black?

Hooper: He didn't have any luck with it. He opened it once, but he didn't have any luck. Then he rented to somebody else to try the restaurant and they didn't have any luck. So he now rents it to a, some, I don't know what they are, Spanish people or what. But he has it rented. And it's supposed to be a restaurant, but there's not that much business there.

Q: Where did you shop when you went downtown? What stores?

Hooper: Ohrbach's.

Q: What were some of the best stores to shop at in downtown Newark?

Hooper: Not now. I don't know.

Q: Not now, but I'm saying years back when you shopped. What were some of the best stores?

Hooper: We used to go to Macy's and Ohrbach's and Kresge's.

Q: Why did you go down there?

Hooper: I don't go anywhere. My children bring me most of everything that I wear from somewhere else.

Q: You mean nowadays, but I'm talking about when your kids were growing up? When your kids were growing up the stores that you went to.

Hooper: J. C. Penney used to be downtown. All the good stores used to be down there. And we'd shop in all of them.

Q: Okay. Were there any incidents of racial discrimination?

Hooper: Not that I know of.

Q: You've been discriminated against in Newark? You have any experiences that you can remember? You mentioned you couldn't.

Hooper: Yeah, when I went to borrow money for my daughter to go to school, I was discriminated against.

Q: How so? Was this a bank?

Hooper: Banks wouldn't lend us any money. All of the banks in Newark. Every one we went to said no. But we ended up going to Jersey.

Q: Going where?

Hooper: United Jersey Bank in Elizabeth. That's where we borrowed the money for her to go to school.

Q: I see you have the bank statements there. So you've been a member of that bank ever since then.

Hooper: Ever since. I always did. If I only have a hundred dollars or fifty dollars, whatever I have, I'm going to have it in the United Jersey Bank all the time. I stayed with Howard because I liked Howard. At one time all of the children in school had bank accounts. They had a banker who had it set it so that children could bank in school. And children used to bank at least twenty-five cents every week. Was more work for the teachers, but it was good for the children. I liked Howard for that. But Howard did not lend us money. So I borrowed money, we borrowed money from First Fidelity in Elizabeth and we continued to borrow money from them. Because my husband died and my husband died in July. And so I just keep a checking account and a little bit of dollars in --

Q: United Jersey Bank. Let me ask you this. Let's go to another subject. What do you remember about the Mayor of Springfield Avenue?

Hooper: The Mayor?

Q: Yeah. The Mayor of Springfield Avenue. These are things that are supposed to be specifically about Newark. Do you remember anyone being given that title?

Hooper: No.

Q: Do you remember anything about a local personality named William Ashby? He was a black social worker.

Hooper: Ashby. Yes.

Q: You remember Ashby? What were your remembrances of him?

Hooper: He was very outstanding. In everything, he was out there helping.

Q: What about Meyer Ellingstein?

Hooper: Meyer Ellingstein was the very good mayor.

Q: I understand he was the first Jewish Mayor. He was Newark's first Jewish mayor.

Hooper: Yeah. Cause I didn't have too much dealings with him. But he was supposed to be very good.

Q: What about the name Prosper Brewer, Newark's first black policeman. Do you remember him?

Hooper: Brewer.

Q: First name was Prosper.

Hooper: I've heard of him. But I don't know that much about him.

Q: Any recollection about Irving Turner?

Hooper: Irving Turner. Yeah.

Q: What do you remember about Irving Turner?

Hooper: Irving Turner was down, he was in with the gang. He was in with them. That's why he got into trouble.

Q: He ended up getting into trouble. I don't know the story behind that. Well, tell me something about what you remember about the black institutions, such as the hospitals, the hotels, and banks.

Hooper: There used to be a black hospital on Kenney Street. Nothing but blacks. Now the hospital on Avon Avenue, I don't think it was black. I think it was mixed. On the corner of Irvington Blvd. and Avon Avenue is a building over there. The house is gone and all the people. There used to be a doctor there. And this goes way back about sixty years. I used to go in there when I lived on the corner.

Q: You lived where? I didn't understand you. You were saying, you lived where?

Hooper: I lived on Avon Avenue. No, Avon Place. Street's closed off now. But those little brown houses on the corner of Avon and Trapper Place. Beautiful houses.

Q: What about hotels? Do you remember any black hotels?

Hooper: Been a lot of teachers who lived there.

Q: I'm sorry. I'm not following you. I was asking about hospitals. You're talking about the doctor's office, the doctor.

Hooper: Yeah. Well, I want to say is that that street there was very, very nicely, always a lot of the teachers and things lived in there, in that block. From Clinton Avenue to Avon Avenue. In that block. You know that big house is all nailed up on the corner now.

Q: I'm sure I've seen it.

Hooper: Well, it's a very nice house. My house, my brother was one of the first black people to move into that house. Gorgeous house. And he lived there quite a while. The house is there but it's all nailed up. It's right on the corner of Clinton and --

Q: Avon.

Hooper: Avon Place.

Q: Okay. I'm asking you about hotels. Were there any black hotels that you can remember? Black banks? I'm just thinking of institutions that were black owned.

Hooper: I don't know much about them, the hospitals, since I didn't go there that much.

Q: Not even to have your children?

Hooper: What?

Q: You didn't go to the hospitals to have your children?

Hooper: Oh yes. I went to that hospital, yes. I thought you said hotels.

Q: No. No. No. No. I'm just asking about different institutions.

Hooper: Yeah. I went to the City Hospital and had three children.

Q: What City Hospital.

Hooper: That's what they call United Jersey. First city hospital. And I had three children there. Jimmie, Frankie and Theresa. I was treated all right. Was treated fine.

Q: Now do you recall any kind of music that you may have heard in Newark? You remember listening to musicians perform jazz, gospel, blues? And if so, where, where did you go to see all that.

Hooper: I can't recall.

Q: Did you go out to some of these places, the places to see different musicians?

Hooper: Didn't go.

Q: Did you ever go to key clubs, Sparky J's or places?

Hooper: Where?

Q: Key clubs, Sparky J's, or downtown places in Newark?

Hooper: No.

Q: Or do you remember others?

Hooper: I told you about the book I had. Tells you a whole lot of stuff. I lent it to somebody.

Q: What book was this?

Hooper: It was written by, promised to get me another one. Couple more.

Q: This was the stuff about things that you?

Hooper: He was the.

Q: Talking about Barbara Kucko's book, "Swing City".

Hooper: Yes. Did you see it?

Q: Some of it. Haven't finished.

Hooper: I read it all. And my children's name is in there. Bell's name is in there. Rose name is in there. A lot of things that I know that belonged to Mt. Zion their name is in that book. And I lent it to somebody to read. And she promised that she'd send it to me. Said she was going to do a story on me. She never has. Next time I see her, it's way past due.

Q: Now tell me about your leisure time activities. I know you talked about your gardening. How your flowers and your vegetable garden. Were there other things that you do like quilting, singing, story telling, basket weaving?

Hooper: I did the gardening after I moved here, fifty-four years now. Forty to now. Caught on that thing. Count it.

Q: Fifty-six years.

Hooper: Fifty-six years I've been in this house.

Q: Can you tell me something about the baseball team, the Newark Eagles?

Hooper: I don't know. I didn't know.

Q: You didn't know about them.

Hooper: No.

Q: Okay. So you didn't attend of those games.

Hooper: I didn't pay enough attention to it to know.

Q: Okay. Well, let's see. But I remember your saying, you were.

Hooper: Cmon in lady. [Interruption to talk to someone coming in]

Q: Sort of skipping around here, but you were talking about Mrs. Louise Scott. You said you remembered her.

Hooper: Yeah. Had a beauty parlor.

Q: We were discussing your remembrances of Mrs. Louise Scott. Just tell me a little bit about what you remember about her.

Hooper: I remember people talking about Mrs. Scott, Mrs. Scott. And they said she was a good beautician. So I went to her when she had the shop on Somerset Street. And then another time I went after she moved in this building.

Q: So you've seen the inside. You saw the inside of the mansion when it was in its heyday.

Hooper: That's right.

Q: Well, could you describe what you saw?

Hooper: No. I couldn't. I just knew it was nice.

Q: Did you know any of the families that lived in the area over there on High Street? Or people who worked for people who lived on High Street?

Hooper: I did know. Now, what is that guy's name? He manufactured hair products. He lived right across there, and he wanted to move. And so when Public Service came along and offered to buy that property, he and the lady next door were ready to move. And they sold it. That's why they got that little entryway in there.

Q: Where? Talking about over here.

Hooper: Yes. Because and the man sold their property. Our people wouldn't sell theirs. So all those vacant lots, all that on that side, where people wouldn't sell.

Q: So Public Service wasn't able to do all.

Hooper: Public Service bought that first.

Q: But it was never really built up as a result of people having.

Hooper: But they were going to do it. They had planned to build the whole thing out to the front. But after they, people wouldn't sell their property. So the two houses were sold, two houses down. And built that entryway to go into there. And left the houses there. Need an entry when the houses were sold, they left that vacant lot, they cleaned them up.

Q: What do you remember about Newark in terms of the highest point of black life in Newark?

Hooper: Coming to the highest mark?

Q: No. What was like the black life in Newark. I'm looking at the highest peak as well as the lowest point of living in Newark? Well, let's go to the low point. What would you say was a bad time to be living in the city? When did the? Would the riots be the bad in 1967? Do you view that as a really low point of your life, black life here in the city, or life in general in the city?

Hooper: I think life in general right now is bad for black folks. Too many of us in one home. Too many of us. And you have no respect for one another. That's the biggest problem right now.

Q: When do you remember it being better? Do you remember a time when it was much better? When was that?

Hooper: Way back in 19.

Q: Who was president? What kind of things were going on that you remember? Were you working then?

Hooper: About along in there.

Q: When was it 19.

Hooper: It must have been in 1953. Along in there when it was better.

Q: How so? What made it better?

Hooper: Cause there wasn't so much moving. When they start moving, they start moving you,

when they start moving us. It had to be in the 50s, early, 52, 53, 54 something like that. In the early 50s when they started, really started moving out of here really. After the riots. When did you get the date on the riots?

Q: 67.

Hooper: 57?

Q: 67. Well, you're saying then after the riots it really got even worse.

Hooper: Yes. People moved more then. And when they said that schools had to, children had to go to the school that they were in their district.

Q: Okay that would have been in the 50s. That would have been like 54.

Hooper: And when they said that, then the Jews began to move off of High Street. And all the doctors and things along Clinton Avenue down there they begin to move. And when they begin to move, it got worse. They moved, blacks came in, and all kind of blacks if they could pay the rent. That's what they were worried about rent.

Q: Well, we've been talking for a number of hours over a couple of days about things. Could you sum up your experience of having lived in Newark. Anything you'd like to say.

Hooper: I like Newark all right. What do I have to do in Newark? There's nothing to do here. Just Newark is Newark. I used to enjoy going to Symphony Hall all the time. In fact, I was one of the backers for the New Jersey Symphony. They had an organization that used to back them. And we would always meet and we'd had to raise money and always have a reception after Symphony Hall came in, did their concerts. We always were there. It was there to entertain people after the show was over we always entertained them in the back of.

Q: Like a reception afterwards.

Hooper: Yes. For certain people. We had a crowd, but we always had them. Had that reception for them. Quite a difference, but that was a nice little organization.

Q: What was the name of that organization? In conclusion, if you had your life to live over again, would you live it here in Newark?

Hooper: Yes. I'd be living in Newark.

Q: Can you give a reason, any strong reason why you wouldn't want to live here? Is there a reason why you're saying that?

Hooper: Nobody bothers me because I don't get in the way for them to bother me. That's the way I feel. So I could live in.

END SIDE TWO, TAPE FOUR

END OF INTERVIEW